

THE EGOTISTICAL I



ELLEN WILKINS TOMPKINS



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THE EGOTISTICAL I

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BY
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TO
THE IMAGINARY LISTENER]

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CHAPTER I

THE COMMONPLACE AND MY SECOND SELF

IT always pleases the Imaginary Listener for me to talk about myself. I think this is largely due to the great affection he feels for me, but he says not so, that I interest him because I am different from the ordinary run of humanity, a statement that, if it is true, I most deeply deplore. I adore the ordinary run of humanity and, barring an uncommon weakness of one lung that has made an old man of me at the youthful age of some sixty years, I see no reason why I should not become a member of the large and ever increasing society of the commonplace.

I am admirably fitted by nature to join that association. I am not the proud owner of a commanding presence, a heavy lower jaw, a square cut face of virile strength and manliness, a scholarly look of æsthetic culture and intellectual refinement, and, last but not least,

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I am not redeemed from positive ugliness by a pair of keen, penetrating eyes overshadowed by bushy eyebrows. One must possess at least one of these characteristics to rise above the average, and it is one of my proud boasts that I am a simple American gentleman, clean shaven and endowed with a generous supply of common sense. To me the abnormal in anything is more or less terrifying and I am firmly convinced that very clever people are often passively unhappy.

This line of thought reminds me of the Chance Acquaintance I met last summer. When I arrived at the watering place where I have vegetated for the last twelve years, I found the hotel crowded with people, all members of the Merchants' Retail Association. My own table, overlooking the water, had become the property of a merchant, his wife, and two hoydenish, young misses, his daughters, to judge from the family resemblance. The proprietor was most apologetic. It was only a matter of a few days, but he could not spare me a table to myself. I left him the selection of my table companions and the result was the Chance Acquaintance, a young woman in the early thirties, whose society proved so congenial that I stayed where I had been placed the rest of the summer. We both liked a mod-

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erately early breakfast, were cordial over our fruit, confidential over our cereal, and regretably intimate over our coffee and rolls.

"The Lord, Mr. Wilkes," she said to me earnestly on one occasion with a glance of pity around the dining room, "the Lord has been more than kind to the commonplace. He has provided so many of their own sort that they can always find a talkative soul with whom to gossip the time away. They need never feel set apart from their fellow men."

"We can not all be geniuses," I objected mildly.

"Of course not," she assented, "but it would be nice if there had been only two types, the genius and the commonplace. It is sometimes very lonely for the poor beings who grow up to find that they are neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good, red herring."

"Such people," I said firmly, "should form a little circle of their own. I sometimes think we are too reserved with our fellow men. It would pay, I believe, to put forth a luminous thought now and then, to dangle it as a bait before these poor stupid clods in the hope that one brighter than the rest might rise to the surface and swallow both the bait and you at the same time."

"You are talking nonsense, Mr. Wilkes,"

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she retorted, "you cannot put forth your real self for fear of appearing ridiculous and you, yourself, must have often felt that you had rather be pitied than laughed at."

While I was gathering my forces for a crushing answer to these last words, she rose and went out of the dining room, leaving me in a seething state of indignation and regret. Indignation that she had so coolly placed me in the same category as herself outside the safe haven of the commonplace and regret that I had so frostily nipped in the bud the little tender shoot thrust from the inner self of the Chance Acquaintance. At supper I tried to renew the conversation, but she merely remarked that "Life was a wale of tears" and adroitly turned my thoughts to equally interesting if more impersonal topics.

My conscience has always pricked me about this matter. I did not play fair with my table friend. Had I been honest, I would have owned up not only to the lonely feeling, but to the *bête noire* of my early life, the second self. Whenever I talk about this weighty personage, the Imaginary Listener looks exceedingly grave and says that the whole affair is too complex for him to understand. I always give him the same lucid explanation, that I am conscious of

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possessing two personalities, a physical and a mental self.

My physical self is an eminently commonplace being who, left to his own devices, would lead a happy, humdrum life and, at the blow of the last trumpet, be more than content to rise from a turfed grave surmounted with a neat, initialed slab of granite. My mental self, on the contrary, is a piquant individuality with an old world cleverness that disheartens even as it amuses. In his uncongenial surroundings he finds no outlet for his nature, so turns and harasses my physical self and then laughs Quilpishly at the acts and words that he, himself, has inspired. This inner Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde arrangement has made me lead a solitary life the more so as I was forced without my own wish or volition, the better part of my youth, to impersonate my mental or, as I for convenience call him, my second self.

Mine has not been an enviable job. I love my simple physical self. His pleasures are my pleasures, his sorrows are my sorrows and, much as a mother wraps a shawl around the hunchback shoulders of her child, so I strive to conceal his gaucheries from the quick eyes of my second self. But, after all, my sympathies are equally divided. If I love the one, I yearn over the other. My second self is an

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odd fellow, critical, always at variance with his physical companion, high strung, sensitive and, but for a saving sense of humor, morbid to a fault. He does not except himself from the keen shafts of his ridicule and the world is not one wit wiser if his smile is a bit wry, his laughter, a trifle hollow. He has moments of unalloyed bliss, but these in no way make up for his hours of black despair, his fits of bitter self condemnation. I long to salve the wounds he receives from his own caustic wit, but mine is ever the role of an onlooker, moved to the quick, but powerless to help this dual companionship.

I could not talk like this to the Chance Acquaintance, much as I valued her confidences. I could not tell a woman that old age was the only panacea for this evil, although with me such has proved to be the case. The nearer I draw to the things that will be, the less I care for the things that have been. My outlook that, in the past, was always introspective now fastens itself upon higher and more intangible hopes and fears and the years, the kindly years, have rubbed off the sharp corners of my two selves so that they dwell together in unity. If my life is uneventful, it is full of peace, and I am content to sit and marvel at the change

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within myself. I am broader minded, fairer in my judgments, less eager to avenge real or fancied insults, and lastly, with the abeyance of the second self, I am beginning to know and love my fellow men.

After all we are not unlike so many prisms of glass, dull, opaque perhaps at first sight, but, if held to the right light, miracles of entrancing delicacy of color. We are far too apt to take these prisms at their face value and so pass by rare treasures of loveliness. I said something of this sort to the Chance Acquaintance when I went with her to the station the day that she was leaving.

"Good-bye, Mr. Wilkes," she said, "I shall always think of you as a sort of up-to-date Diogenes going around with your little lantern in search of an honest man."

"Well, why not?" I answered, and told her my fancy about the prisms.

She listened very patiently and there was a wonderfully kind smile on her face when she asked, "Do you believe this, Mr. Wilkes?"

"Of course I do," I retorted. "How about the red-nosed drummer who insists on giving me the *Washington Post*? He has to get it anyway, he says, and it's but decent to save me a nickel. How about the old gentleman who

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sits next to me at the writing desk every morning and always gives me the best of his excellent stub pens and the choice of the overworked blotters? Everyone has a good side if you can but find it."

The Chance Acquaintance was silent for a few minutes, then looked rather sadly at me.

"What have you found in me?" she asked.

"You have listened most patiently to a boring old man," I said.

"You have been equally patient with a boring old maid," she returned.

We were both very quiet after this and our parting would have been a somewhat melancholy performance, but for the unexpected appearance of the red-nosed drummer. He had the *Washington Post* under his arm and said as he handed it to me, "I have to get it anyway and it may save you a nickel." We all three laughed and the Chance Acquaintance took advantage of the sunshiny moment to board the waiting train.

"I am going to try your point of view," she announced as the train moved off, "but we can't all be alike you know."

I waved my hand to her and started homeward. One of Kipling's rhymes popped into my head.

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“You can work it out by Fractions or by simple Rule of Three,
But the way of Tweedledum is not the way of Tweedledee.
You can twist it, you can turn it, you can plait it till you drop,
But the way of Pilly-Winky’s not the way of Winky-Pop.”

The unassailable truth of this rhyme is very gratifying to me. How boring an endless line of Tweedledums, how stupid a roomful of Tweedledees. And what an upheaval in the world of fashion. The opera glass, the supercilious lorgnette would become toys of the past. No matter how devoted you may be to a Pilly-Winky, it is useless to hunt for one if you know for a certainty the checker board only holds Winky-Pops. I am of the same mind as my friend, Susan Nipper, “I may be fond of pennywinkles, but it does not follow that I am to have them for tea.”

CHAPTER II

HYPOCRITES ALL

I AM astonished to find out that so far I have not mentioned the Youthful Pessimist. Next to the Imaginary Listener she is my most devoted chum and our friendship has lasted twenty-one years, eight months and some days for I was introduced to her the day that she was born.

Her mother was an old sweetheart of mine, her father the friend of my school days, so that, when for motives of economy, we simultaneously decided to move outside the city limits, it was most natural that we built our houses side by side and worked our little farms together. By some unaccountable freak of fortune the city moved our way and, as prices went up, we disposed of our superfluous property to our great advantage and began to pat ourselves upon the back for the foresight we had shown in our investment of real estate. We are now one of the most fashionable suburbs of the city and my farm has dwindled

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to a fair sized garden wherein I raise with equal success, chickens and flowers.

When I consider that I am a contemporary of her parents, I can but marvel at my friendship with the Youthful Pessimist for our intimacy has thriven apace until we have reached that comfortable state that looks upon a pause in the conversation as a proof of the most absolute congeniality rather than a danger signal to call forth a shower of vapid small talk. The Youthful Pessimist has filled an empty space in my heart and satisfied a real craving for human affection. She is, as it were, the earthly complement of the Imaginary Listener, an actual tangible reality who never jars upon my varying moods, but, if anything, likes me the better for my aloofness from the world in general.

In appearance she has strayed far from the commonplace, her only insignificant feature a small, snub nose, a direct inheritance from her Aunt Caddy Caldwell and therefore much admired by that estimable lady. With this exception she has made a most skilful selection from her parents and, if the result is a somewhat heterogeneous jumble of the blonde and the brunette, the general effect is altogether desirable and pleasing to the eye. She has her father's rough, curly, black hair and long soft,

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black eyelashes and her mother's blue eyes and the dead white skin that rightly goes with red, or by courtesy, auburn hair. Her slight near-sightedness is a foible of her father's and her freckles the gift of her red-headed mother. This higgledy piggledy mixture of colors has given her a highly artificial look, but, so far from shunning publicity, the Youthful Pessimist has often gleefully called my attention to the obvious fact that she was the observed of all observers. She has the same effect on a street car or crowded drawing room as a period has at the end of a sentence, and she takes an innocent pleasure in the sensation she invariably creates.

Her figure is admirably adapted to the present styles. She is small, straight as a dart, flat backed, and so exceeding slim that she can change her waist line at will to suit the shifting fashions. Altogether she is a twentieth century product from the crown of her head to the tip of her high-heeled pump, but on that account none the less a woman.

I am ashamed to confess it, but it was really my luncheon that reminded me so forcibly of the Youthful Pessimist. I had creamed chicken and fig pudding, two favorite dishes with both of us. I am a great believer in mental telepathy and, when I saw the treat I

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had in store for me, I closed my eyes and longed for the Youthful Pessimist. On this occasion the experiment was successful for, when I opened them again, behold, she stood in the doorway, clad in a blue frock of the delft shade she affects so extensively and with her hair stuck out to a degree that would have scandalized a shop girl. Under one arm she carried a bag of knitting, under the other, her ineane little French poodle, Tony, the gift I surmise of a certain Anthony, a great visitor of my neighbor.

"Good morning, Timothy," she said as she kissed me, a very pleasant habit of hers, "I have decided to lunch with you."

"Roger," I ordered, "put out the strawberry jam."

"Aunt Caddy Caldwell is coming to spend the day," she announced when she had settled herself comfortably in the chair that is always placed at the table for the stray dropper in.

"How could you leave?" I asked and, quite unintentionally on my part, stared reflectively at Aunt Caddy's nose.

She held a small freckled hand before her face.

"Don't, Timothy, that look hurts," she said. "Mother did want me to stay at home, but,

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after I told her how badly you were feeling, she consented to let me come here."

"But I am not feeling badly," I objected indignantly. "I never felt better in my life and shall say so to your mother."

"Now, Timothy, don't get me into trouble," she pleaded, "it isn't as if I had laid you low with anything special. Why you can take your choice and have what you like, headache, gout, rheumatism, lumbago, neuralgia——"

"You are incorrigible, miss," I interrupted sternly, "would you have me deceive your good mother?"

Truth compels me to state that at this crushing rebuke the Youthful Pessimist had the audacity to laugh, so joyously and infectiously that I perforce joined in with a faint smile.

"Don't you care," she said easily, "if you bring it down to a fine point we are all hypocrites. I am one myself. Now take the case of Aunt Caddy Caldwell. If I could only tell her frankly how I loathe her to call me Annie instead of Anne and how much it bores me to hear the same story three times the same day, we might get along nicely together. As it is I have to 'Oh' and 'Ah' at the right places and listen as attentively as if I had never——"

"Inherited her nose," I put in.

"Exactly," she agreed and thoughtfully fed

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Tony small bits of bread soaked in chicken gravy.

Our luncheon was a pleasant meal and, by the time we arrived at the fig pudding, the Youthful Pessimist had become fairly garrulous. After all there is something very refreshing about her conversation. With her white is white and black is black, while with me white is white, but black, oftener than not to my hopeful eye, looks of a grayish consistency, a sort of over-worked white. She would be eminently suited to separate the sheep from the goat, even if she herself belonged to the latter variety, and I should be extremely apt to disregard individual characteristics but, under the broad head of quadruped, usher them all into the kingdom of heaven. She was in a self-condemnatory mood and turned a searchlight, so to speak, on the glaring defects of her character.

It transpired that she had been a pharasaical child and had really never outgrown her childish ways. She still rubbed the spilt tea into the carpet, hid the bits of broken china, and surreptitiously darned the snags in her frocks. Added to these iniquities, she had acquired a number of social deceptions, was always out to the inconvenient caller, often politic to the verge of hypocrisy and had developed, I quote

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exactly here, a real genius for successfully wiggling out of difficulties. Her manner was so nonchalant, her appetite for jam, so unimpaired that I should have thought her indifferent to her lack of moral backbone had she not assured me that she had given a great deal of thought to the subject and intended in the future to head a crusade against the growing use of social frauds and hypocrisies. The necessary fib that is told for politeness' sake, however, she would not discard. It was the only string she attached to her noble resolve. I think this last statement referred to Aunt Caddy Caldwell, although it seems to me impossible to call any two hundred pound weight a string, even when speaking in a most metaphorical manner.

"Shall you tell everyone about your slips in the past?" I inquired.

"Best let sleeping dogs lie, Timothy," she quoted oracularly with what sounded suspiciously to me like the twin sister of a giggle.

I had just said didactically that the necessary fib was not essential and could be used to cover a multitude of sins when Sellars appeared, and we went out on the back veranda to cool our heated argument.

Sellars is a young protégé of mine, a doctor, clever and attractive, but astonishingly dog-

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matic. As his attitude toward the Youthful Pessimist is not only indifferent, but almost antagonistic, I conclude he has a natural antipathy to all women. He said at once that women were the perpetrators of most of the shams of the age, and I was so nettled with him for pre-empting my opinion that I promptly sided with the Youthful Pessimist and spoke at some lengths in defence of the necessary fib. To illustrate my remarks, I asked my audience to accompany me on an imaginary walk in order that I might prove to them how even the smallest incidents of our every day life tended to lure you from the narrow path of truthfulness.

I had hardly left my door, we will say, when Smoot hailed me. Smoot lives across the street from us and is mainly remarkable as the father of the gargoyle, a boy baby some ten or eleven months old. He was apparently innocently employed in inspecting his offspring, but my worst fears were realized when I found I was called upon to admire the gargoyle. As I am a conscientious man, I made an honest effort to pick out one redeeming feature. I give you the inventory as it stood or, to be more exact, as it sat, two large, outstanding ears, one big head without any hair, two red, pendulous cheeks, one small nose of no particular description,

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and a mouth that stretched from ear to ear in a wholesome and mirth provoking grin. I seized on the smile and said the baby was a jolly, little fellow, but this fell far short of the father's expectations and, before I had finished, I had endowed the gargoyle with all the attractions of an Adonis. Smoot senior was delighted and I experienced that warm glow that always follows an artistic flight of the imagination, especially one that comes under the head of the necessary fib.

The next few blocks were uneventful and then I met Thompson. Thompson is the assistant of our church and an assiduous visitor. He is a pale, pasty youth and has that under done appearance that comes from having been baked in too cool an oven.

Now I rarely or never go to church. My lung requires unlimited fresh air and I have no wish to annoy it by placing it in a congested congregation. Thompson had that look that all clergy wear when rounding up the erring sheep and, as he shook hands with me, I felt it wiser to enlist his sympathies with a small almost a baby cough. His face changed so quickly that I thought it better to cough several times during our conversation. He told me he had been to see me and I urged him to try again. My conscience pricked me because

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I hate to deceive a minister, also Thompson bores me.

At this point Sellars thought to get the better of me by saying that after all these were only efforts of my fancy, but I had foreseen this argument on his part and was able to assure him that these two incidents had actually occurred. I offered to give him some more examples of the necessary fib, but it was getting late and the Youthful Pessimist had an engagement for the afternoon. Sellars had the grace to see her home and, when they went off together, he was still inveighing against all women with a very big W.

After they left, the porch was very quiet. I smoked my afternoon pipe and thought of the Youthful Pessimist. When I shut my eyes, I could almost fancy her opposite me in the Gloucester hammock, the wind blowing her hair, the dog in her lap. She is so tender as she caresses her silly little beast, so absurdly careful of her little toy animal that I seem to catch a glimpse of the latent and, as yet unknown, depths of motherhood within her nature and I pray that I may live until I see something equally helpless but infinitely dearer cling to the blue cotton gown, be soothed by the small, freckled hand and looked down upon

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by the dear, near-sighted eyes of the Youthful Pessimist.

Roger interrupted my day dream. There was a lady at the door who would pay me a little visit if I were not asleep or too unwell to see her. I took the card. The lady was Aunt Caddy Caldwell. I tiptoed softly across to the Gloucester hammock.

"Roger," I said as I laid my head into what had been the lap of the Youthful Pessimist but was now a neat, cross-stitched pillow, "I am feeling better than I was, a great deal better, but I am asleep and you do not like to disturb me, Roger."

Roger bowed respectfully and disappeared. He belongs to the type of the soldier mentioned in the Charge of the Light Brigade, "Theirs not to reason why, Theirs but to do and die."

I closed my eyes. The hammock was comfortable. I might really go to sleep after all. The Youthful Pessimist was responsible for my conduct to Aunt Caddy, of course. Still she was right and Sellars wrong. It is equally essential to men and women, the necessary fib.

CHAPTER III

THE GENTLE ART OF CONVERSATION

THE Youthful Pessimist has joined a class of French literature, accompanied by the usual amount of English-French conversation. She is also privately reviewing French history in order that she may shine among her fellow students and, as she was never one to hide her knowledge from the world at large, a French fact or thought often proves the inspiration for many of our discussions. The present topic is the French salon, and so enthusiastic are we that, did such institutions exist to-day, I fear we should forsake our homes, step across the water and, as quickly as possible, swear allegiance to glorious France.

The Youthful Pessimist feels personally aggrieved that America can lay no claims to any such intellectual gatherings. If France had her salons, England had her inns and taverns made famous by the notable men of that day, but at no time in the history of our country have

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our writers and thinkers evinced the slightest desire to form a coterie of their own, a coterie that could be handed down for posterity to gape at and admire. We both agree that this conviviality is now an impossibility, a thing of the past, and the Youthful Pessimist goes so far as to assert that, with the exception of some few shining lights, the American mind, as a whole, has deteriorated to meet the exigencies of American life.

"It's an age of high living and low thinking, Timothy," quoth she disdainfully.

As I come under the heading of the American mind, I very promptly differed with her and pointed out that, after all, we were mere creatures of habit and too often but a melancholy photograph of our environments. Also we were both a prosaic and a busy century and, when the hands were over worked, the head was apt to be under cultivated. Such is the case of our working people and our leisure class of free born Americans are equally occupied. The dilettante and dabbler in literature has given way to the tennis player and golf enthusiast. The descendants of the hysterical miss and the pale, pedantic student of the last century shout "Fore" as lustily as if their revered grandparents were not turning in their graves at the indecent sight of such

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noisy and healthy employment. Also we were a simple people, but it did not imply a lack of brains on our part that we were pleased with simple things.

I was delighted when the Youthful Pessimist brought over Madame Maltese's new kittens to show me, and we whiled away a pleasant hour watching the gyrations of the little animals. She had seemed overjoyed at the gift of a new laid egg of Dame Leghorn's, a noteworthy event, as the capricious little lady has eschewed the laying of eggs for the last month or six weeks. This is all very sweet, very natural, but not salon talk. Well hardly! Still one would scarcely say that the pair of us were lacking in mind or intellect.

"What ails us then, Timothy?" the Youthful Pessimist asked pertinently, "What ails us then?"

I hesitated a little before I answered her question. In my mind's eye I went over the list of my acquaintances, examined the tongues of each as a wise physician should and placed a rough estimate on the real ability each one possessed. I believe my diagnosis to be correct. Our malady is not a dearth of brains, but a dearth of unselfishness, a dearth of interest in what is biblically termed our neighbor. We are so self centered that it becomes

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an actual annoyance to simulate an interest that we do not feel and so we continually stand outside the drab walls of conventionality simply because we are too careless and inert to reach for the key that opens the door of the temple itself.

"Suppose," the Imaginary Listener suggests, "suppose the interior turns out to be a weed ridden, bramble choked space?"

A bitter disappointment my dear friend, but an exception rather than a rule and, if once you become a frequenter of the inner courts, you learn to love the charming secluded chambers and, as the eyes are sharpened by love or friendship, you begin to discern in the pure white light the shadow of the substance of the man, fashioned like unto yourself and stamped with the godhead of the creator. Why stand in the ante chamber when the master himself bids you sup with him? However, to enjoy these privileges we must shake off the shackles of the stereotype.

Mrs. A, who is very musical, wishes me to go with her to see Mrs. B, who is very artistic. It is a happy coincidence that Mrs. B is attempting to buy a sweet-toned piano and that Mrs. A is longing for some one to advise her how to hang her pictures. Now you would naturally suppose that these two ladies, so

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plainly in need of each other, both gifted above the average, would find some subject other than the stereotyped small talk.

But such was not to be the case. They spoke of the weather and their servants. Mr. A it seemed liked rare done steak while Mr. B required his burnt to a crisp. These details took the better part of a visit and, after a few pleasant words about the children, we departed to call on Mrs. C, whose husband will not eat steak under any circumstances.

Our grandmothers had the advantage of us in the art of conversation. In some respects the enforcing of the unwritten eleventh commandment, wash not thy soiled linen in public, stood them in good stead. By their words ye shall know them, might well be said of the gentlefolk of the old regime. The conversation of that era was divided into three classes, the good, the bad, and the vulgar and, if you had to make a selection other than the good, you showed your social status when you chose between the bad and the vulgar. Society, then as now, was much more sympathetic with the sinner than the vulgarian.

When such topics as the servant question, your poverty or the lack of it as the case might be, the cost of your winter hats or garments, the unfortunate disposition of your husband,

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brother, sister or mother-in-law were debarred our grandmothers were thrown back upon the resources within themselves and to successfully draw out and entertain their guests became, not only a matter of moment, but of plain necessity. And so skilfully did they manage that the little dribbling streams of small talk oftener than not broadened into the smooth flowing river of conversation. When you come to think of it, it is very pleasant to journey into the unexplored territory of your neighbor's mind and, if we are thriftily inclined, we can acquire quite a store of beneficial knowledge provided we observe the "come off the grass" signs and abstain from announcing too loudly, "Here we are on Tom Tiddler's ground picking up gold and silver."

Sad to say, I was never a ready child and have often heard my dear mother expound on the attractions of what she called, "her wooden baby." I deduced that, though I was a silent and inscrutable infant, I was on the whole more companionable than otherwise. My defect amounted to a positive virtue. I consider that I started life handicapped and will admit that what little I know of the art of conversation has been gained by hard knocks and rather dreary experiences. But I live and learn, and

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count over my string of friends as religiously as a nun ever counted her beads.

I call to mind one occasion wherein I showed almost Machiavellian depths of strategy. I was made executor of a cousin's estate and, for certain family reasons, I felt obliged to accept the responsibility thrust upon me. My wards live in a nearby town, and I am occasionally forced to descend upon them to discuss business from their point of view. This involves visiting the oldest girl, lately married, when I should much prefer putting up at a comfortable hotel.

The first visit was a ghastly affair, not, I hasten to add, from lack of care on the part of my host and hostess. My creature comforts were most carefully attended to. I was, if anything, over fed, and as a natural consequence unduly silent. We could not forever discuss business, and frankly I failed to interest these two well intentioned but common-place young people. There were impossible gaps in the conversation, much boring small talk and, though we parted with many expressions of good will, I could not but feel my pulse quicken at the thought of my safe return to my solitary house again.

You can imagine with what dismay I approached the time of my second visit. Never

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was a man so beset. On one side lay my Waterloo of the previous year, on the other, my elusive dream of a paid for room and, between the two, a mountain of injured feelings, cousinly feelings at that. My stay had given them no pleasure, but a refusal of their hospitable invitation would amount to a positive slap in the face. I capitulated to the old proverb that blood is thicker than water and started off with the same cheerful thoughts that I carry with me to the dentist's chair.

On the train two brilliant ideas struck me. I could, by a little management, shorten my stay by one day, and during that stay I resolved to talk on, we will say, four topics. I gave much thought to the selection of these topics. Number one was easy. They were building a house. I would discuss architecture of whatever design they fancied. Number two was travel. They had spoken of a trip and I had a dim recollection of a revolving book-case filled with time tables. Number three was clothes, for there is nothing a woman likes better than a well turned compliment on herself or her wearing apparel and, after some hesitation, I hit upon the church as number four. There was no particular reason for my last selection, but it is a safe and reliable topic and always meets with a respectful if not

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enthusiastic reception. I felt a great deal easier after I had made up my mind as to my course of action and, when I found they had come to meet me, I was ready with a cheerful smile.

"How are you, Louise?" I kissed her in a fatherly manner. "Upon my word, Ned, you take good care of this little girl. No expense spared, eh?" Here I laughed knowingly, Louise blushed, Ned grinned like the far-famed Cheshire cat, the ice was broken and my visit began under clear and shining skies.

The Imaginary Listener always insists that my opening words were rather crude, not to say obvious, but they served their purpose and, so to speak, stimulated me to further efforts.

It was a wonderful visit. I spoke of the house. They expanded and, although not artistically inclined, showed a fair amount of practical knowledge. In the end I was conducted over the building and acquitted myself well, despite the fact that I got a nasty blow on my shin from a loose plank and almost sprained my ankle on the unfinished steps.

We had some nice talks on travel and the church for, of course, number three could only be used in the light of an interjection. I quote here an expression of the Youthful Pessimist, a sort of sunshine spreader. Ned and Louise

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did not actually travel, but were always considering a trip. Hence the time tables. Hence Ned's accurate knowledge of trains and steamboats. He could make a fortune as ticket agent or head secretary to a Travelers' Aid Union. I told him this and he was unfeignedly pleased.

I will dispose of number four by telling you that Ned was a vestryman, treasurer of the missionary society, librarian of the Sunday school and vice-president of the United Laborers' Association, an affair run in connection with the church. I did not shorten my stay. Such a course was not necessary for I was a success, a howling success. I am looking forward to next year and shall use the same topics, a little padding here and there if needful.

Sellars has not been to see me lately, and I said so to the Youthful Pessimist.

"Perhaps he does not like me?" she hazarded.

I snorted at the suggestion, but I shall speak to Sellars. He is an opinionated young ass, but a favorite of mine.

If the rain holds up I shall garden to-morrow.

CHAPTER IV

MY GARDEN

MY garden is like myself, old fashioned and somewhat discursive. It is mine own invention, and I am inordinately proud of it. In spring and summer I never look upon it without exhaling a sigh of content and inhaling a breath of fragrant sweetness.

I finished my breakfast hastily and went to the hen house to get Ratius. Ratius' mother was my first cook and "a colored lady of learning." She named her boy Horatius and her girl Ophelia, using in each case a pronounced accent on the first syllable. O-phelia married a man from "North Caroliny," but I have always had Ratius.

I called him lustily from a distance and Ip came forth to greet me. Ip is a mongrel of the lowest description and shows his lack of breeding by grovelling on his stomach and wagging his mongrel tail whenever I honor him with my presence. "Stand up like a man,"

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I said sternly, but he only whined a servile whine and kept up the grovelling and wagging. I turned my eyes from this abject spectacle and we trailed down the path with Ip in the rear. He keeps me from acquiring a well bred dog for I have not the heart to show the real article to a specimen that is so plainly aware of its own inferiority.

My house faces the north and, that it will be plain to the mind's eye, I had best describe it geographically. It is bounded on the north by a honeysuckle hedge, on the south, by a trellis covered with flowering beans, morning and evening glories and on the east and west by roses of every variety. We always start at the south and end with the west, after which we inspect the shrubbery.

The trellis serves a double purpose. It is not only beautiful to look at, but hides the hen houses and servants' quarters. It is silly of me not to plant a perennial here, ivy I should say, or more honeysuckle; but there is something very delightful to me about the growth of the young vines. Their shade of green reminds me frankly of the shell of a new green pea, and they never seem to lose their first spring freshness. I like to fancy that I train these vines myself and moreover, by this plan, I am enabled to give the trellis a coat of new

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paint whenever the idea strikes me. I twisted some little tendrils about the lattice work.

"Well," I said enquiringly, "how do they look, Ratius?"

"They're all right," said Ratius, who is not a talkative person, and we moved on our leisurely way.

The Youthful Pessimist lives on my east, and here I think I have shown commendable ingenuity. I had some wire arches made somewhat the shape of gigantic croquet wickets, only double and laced together with wire netting. Over the arches I trained crimson ramblers and Dolly Perkins roses, and the result has justified my wildest expectations. This has been a wonderful spring, and I fairly gasped as I looked upon my arches of living pink and red blossoms.

"Well," I cried waving my stick at the ramblers with a pride I did not attempt to conceal, "how do these look, Ratius?"

"They're all right," he answered laconically and I passed on reluctantly to the honeysuckle hedge.

The honeysuckle has not many blooms, but in my opinion is not to be sniffed at.

"How does this look, Ratius?" I asked carelessly.

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"Middling," he retorted with a contemptuous glance at me.

"What's the matter with it?" said I indignantly.

"Brats," he replied sneeringly and spat upon the ground.

I glared at him. If Ratius' mother was a "colored lady" Ratius himself has not the habits and manners of a "colored gentleman." Yet I did not reprove him as I should. His unswerving devotion to me and love for the Youthful Pessimist have made him immune from reproofs such as I would bestow upon an ordinary servant. It is true also that he cannot bear children, and I confess I have encouraged the depredations made upon the hedge. Sometimes I make a pretense of threatening them with my cane, but the youngsters know this is only a little game of mine and laughingly defy me.

I have a high mortared wall on my west which calls out sternly to my neighbors, more plainly than any sign board could, "No trespassers allowed." The roses here bloom later in the year and are both old and every day types. I acquired them along with my house and farm and have transplanted them a number of times, always with unfailing success. There are some microphyllas, some double but very ordinary

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red and pink roses and a delicate and altogether charming bloom, pink tinted and not unlike a refined and beautiful wild rose. This is a variety unknown to me, but Ratius, seeing my fancy for it, in this respect has proved himself a genius. He selected stout, young shoots, drew them into the earth and pinned them securely into place with, oh ye gods what sacrilege, a lady's hair pin. Incredible as it seems, a number of shoots rooted, and to-day I possess a good score of hardy bushes.

I pursued the safe policy of ignoring Ratius for his rudeness and I even pretended not to hear him when, without any inquiry on my part, he shouted in a loud voice, "They're all right." He fidgetted uneasily under my disapproval and now and then murmured, "Hi, Ip. Hi, Ip," a process that caused that unfortunate animal to gambol wildly about me in the uttermost bewilderment and apprehension.

I have a narrow flower bed and next to the roses, partly hiding their bare stalks, an eighteen-inch high wire netting covered with nasturtiums and sweet pea vines. Next follows a spasmodic collection of small plants, balsams, pinks, verbenas, citron aloes and such like, and then a thick and solid border of pansies. I pinched a sprig of citron aloes and

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stuck it in my button hole. I remember when the Youthful Pessimist was recovering from some childish ailment how I sat by her bedside and asked her what I should bring her for a present.

She put her small, thin hand in mine, "A sprig of citron aloes, Timothy," she said without hesitation.

"What will you do with it?" I asked in astonishment.

"Pick a leaf off every day and mash it in my hands," she answered wistfully.

I mashed a leaf and sat down to rest a little while Ratus pretended to busy himself about a fig tree.

For the daytime I like this part of my garden best. It is more primitive and uncivilized and the trees might have been transplanted from Adam and Eve's original garden, so gnarled and twisted and bent with age are they. I concentrate my ideas in one word and call it "woody," and you lift your well-bred eyebrows, you inspector of my garden, and query in amusement, "How so, Timothy?" If I answered at all, I should briefly state that the shrubbery is so thick, the foliage so heavy that, barring some few fruit trees, two figs, two cherries and an antiquated peach, this bit of ground is to my mind not altogether unlike

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a jungle. If, I repeat, if I did say this, there would be more queries, more glances of amusement leveled this time at the cherries, a fruit not usually found in a jungle, but most productive of pleasant thoughts that start with cherry blossoms and end with a certain palatable cherry roll made by my cook who is Rattius' wife. Then, too, here I am free of that sharp disgust of self that comes over me whenever I gaze at the south and southeast part of my garden.

My house, you will understand, except for the saving grace of comfort, is absolutely unpretentious and unassertive. It has two stories and a half attic and, front and back, long, broad porches that run the length of the house. I use the upper porches as bedrooms and the lower ones as sitting rooms. A house is an indispensable object, but I have endeavored to make mine as inconspicuous as possible. It is a dull green and melts into the landscape so that you would never say, "What a wonderful house and garden?" but rather, "What a wonderful garden?" and, if anything, forget the very existence of the house. It is this same house that has given me the heart ache about my garden, the house and my good-for-nothing body that has to be handled as carefully as a glued together ornament. I built with care and

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an eye to my trees a small and unobtrusive home, but I did not bargain for a weak lung that clamored for air and sunshine.

There were seven lindens in my back and side yard, I say it with a sort of heart sick pride. I called them "The Seven Sisters," Rattus, "Them Seven Trees" and the Youthful Pessimist, "The Seven Ees." We named them together, she and I, Estelle, Edna, Erma, Emma, Ethel, Emily, and Eugenie, and in spring time the fragrance of their blooms and the rustling of their leaves made my sleeping porch a nest in the tree tops.

I think the Youthful Pessimist was twelve years old when I acquired the lung, and the doctor who railed against my lindens. First he advised me; next implored me; then commanded me, as I valued my life, to cut down the trees and let in the glaring sunlight. I resisted as long as I could, but finally commonsense had its way and I consented to do away with two magnolias, a sop to Cerberus, and Edna. He grumbled and demanded more. I was firm and, at last, he agreed to over see the job that I might get out of sight and sound of a deed so distasteful to me.

I went to town that day, but I could not forget "The Seven Sisters," and finally I came home resolved to know the worst at once. It

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was lucky that they had completed the job and lucky that the doctor had fled, leaving only a note behind him. For, besides the two magnolias and Edna, they had cut down Eugenie, the best loved of all the sisters, whose branches at times almost swept across my face. The stark, sawed-off trunks rose up to reproach me and the Youthful Pessimist sat weeping among the ruins. I confess that I cried myself and could not be comforted even by the admirable sentiments of the Youthful Pessimist's mother who has always stoutly maintained that it was really for the best. I had the trees chopped up and gave them to the Wainwright girls. One cannot burn one's own friends. Where Edna stood, I put a crepe myrtle bush, but that does not fill the empty space of Eugenie.

After Ratius had finished the fig tree, we walked about until we came to the crepe myrtle bush. Here I sat down to rest again, and Ratius went off with the detestable Ip. I was tired and leaned forward on my cane. I must have taken forty winks for, when I opened my eyes, Sellars sat beside me with his hat pushed back upon his head and his hands stuck in his pockets.

"Shove on your hat, Sellars," I said testily. "You look almost common."

He laughingly obeyed me and said that, as

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I was all alone, he had come in to see me. That expression "all alone" reminded me of the Youthful Pessimist.

"Why do you dislike Anne, Sellars?" I asked almost sternly.

"Good Lord," he answered turning a little pale, "I do not dislike Miss Anne. Did she tell you that I did?"

"Not exactly," I replied trying not to implicate the Youthful Pessimist, "but she said perhaps that was why you did not come to see me so often."

"Ah," said Sellars with a suspicion of a smile, "I repeat I do not dislike Miss Anne."

"Could you be a little nicer to her then, for my sake?" I said coaxingly.

"I will do my best," Sellars answered stiffly.

"You are so abrupt," I went on nervously for Sellars' voice, to put it mildly, lacked enthusiasm. "You could alter that manner if you made an effort."

I stopped for I was suddenly aware of the fact that Sellars was not listening to me. He was staring ahead of him, staring apparently at my house and there was a tight, thin, pinched look to his lips, an unhappy dazed expression in his eyes that gave me a qualm of uneasiness. I like the fellow and think he has taken a fancy to me.

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"Sellars," I said slowly, "have I vexed you? Remember that I am an old man and, after all, your manners are none of my affairs."

I am still surprised at the effect my words had on Sellars. He flung his right arm about my shoulders and with his left hand gripped my hand that lay upon his knee.

"Vexed with you?" he returned with a voice vibrant with feeling. "Impossible, that could never be. You are the person who has made me love this place. When I talk with you, nothing seems improbable, no height too high to scale. I take it you are my friend?"

"You will make an effort," I confess I liked the grip of his hot hands.

"It will be no effort," he said, and I did not doubt his sincerity.

Sellars is a man after my own soul in spite of his moody, and at times overbearing ways, the result I am inclined to believe of a stormy and unhappy youth. Perhaps some idle, silly chit has juggled with his heart and that accounts for his stern determination to make good outside his native state. I fume impotently at the very idea for, had I a son of my own, I should like him to have Sellars' sturdy manhood. That arm, against which I leaned somewhat unnecessarily, seemed to me

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the very embodiment of strength and kindly protection.

As a mere matter of curiosity I asked, "After all, Sellars, just what have I done for you?"

"I was a stranger and you took me in," he answered simply.

CHAPTER V

CHICKENS

IT is raining again to-day in the same determined steady drip that has been drenching my garden for the last three days. I am a very contrary person. I want it cold when it is hot, I'm always wanting what is not, and the rain is fast becoming a nuisance.

If for example we have hot, sunshiny days, I become convinced that my garden is scorched and yellowed and search the heavens for something that even remotely resembles a cloud. At present I am in the opposite frame of mind and am sure that the centers of my roses are fast cankering for lack of a little sunshine and really cannot understand why we do not have more equable weather.

The Youthful Pessimist is away and, as I am decidedly bored, I made up my mind to go to the hen houses. I went to get my own galoshes, but Roger circumvented me and interfered as I knew he would. While I was firm with him

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and showed him that I was the master of the house, yet, as a concession to his faithfulness, I permitted him to wrap me in a rain cape. I also took an umbrella and happily splashed down the garden walk. I did not look behind me because I knew Roger stood on the porch a mute but respectful protest against what I have heard him privately term "my goings on."

There are several reasons why I should inspect the hen houses and one is the speckled chicken that I have saved from either the broiling or the frying pan. On account of its size, I should say the former, on account of its sagacity, I should say the latter.

I was idling on my front porch yesterday watching a man from the produce cart. They always halt beneath my trees to separate their chickens into bunches of six. They then dispose of them to my neighbors who have not my inside information, namely, that the sixth or center chicken is either not long for this world or else too young to have slipped from beneath the shelter of its mother's wing.

On this occasion just as the man was about to complete his first half a dozen, a speckled chicken, not much the worse for wear, escaped from the coop and stepped nimbly to the middle of the muddy road. My sympathies are always with the chicken and, with ill concealed

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joy, I watched the man pursue it, hither and thither, through the mud and the steady rain. He ran it to earth, as I thought, against my hedge, but the chicken gave a frightened squawk, rose high in the air and landed on my well kept lawn. Though it was a good jump, I heard the man swear aloud, and saw him place a sacrilegious hand on my hedge.

"What are you about?" I called sharply and he came sullenly up the walkway.

"Well?" I said.

"It's my chicken," he rasped defiantly.

I glanced at the chicken and, if ever an animal demanded sanctuary, that chicken did. It stood stock still, panting a little from the high jump. It would be a matter of a few minutes to catch it, but sanctuary it demanded and sanctuary it should have. I jingled some loose change in my pocket.

"How much?" I queried.

He would have liked, I think, to double the price. Doubtless there was something about my expression that checked that desire, for I finally paid for what is technically called "a fryer." I think we were both satisfied with our bargain. He had made an unexpected sale and I not only possessed the speckled chicken, but had saved my garden from the hobnailed boots of the produce man. Later in the day,

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when the rain held up, I sent Ratius after it and gave him directions to put it in the hen house. I wondered how it fancied its new quarters.

I have a mixed collection of fowls and divide them into three classes. Number one, the aristocrats, consist of Wyandots, Leghorns, some white and buff Orpingtons and a goodly supply of bantams. These I keep for breeding purposes and to exhibit at state fairs as a sample of what an idle old gentleman can do if he puts his mind to it. Number two is a happy little settlement of mainly married couples, and here I get my fresh eggs, the joy of my life and the envy of my neighbors. Number three are table chickens and these I purchase from a spinster who, without any proof, claims to be a distant connection of mine, and comes to town once a week to substantiate her claim. The table chickens naturally are brief sojourners in my land of plenty but, now and then, I take a fancy to one and transfer it to my settlement, usually with the best results, namely eggs.

Moreover, I want to find out what has become of my quartet. I gave Ratius special orders concerning them and yet this morning I missed their early call. I believe it is rather remarkable for chickens to show any concerted

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action, but lately, indeed, since my last batch from the spinster maid, rising above the ordinary noises of the yard and at about the same hour each morning, four of my table chickens unite in a great and glorious cock a doodle doo. Quaint as it may appear, the pitch of their voices is not unlike the combination of a baritone, a bass, a soprano and a tenor. The latter always led the music, and this morning his voice was silent. The tenor was a black rooster, and I do not believe Rattus would have killed it when I gave orders to the contrary, still it makes me uneasy to remember that yesterday we had an unusually large dish of fried chickens for supper.

The Youthful Pessimist does not care for chickens and asserts that her mother is responsible for the lack of interest on her part. She tells a good story concerning this and, if it is not true, it has been repeated so often that it has gained for itself a certain nook in the family history.

The Youthful Pessimist's godmother gave her a small white chicken and this I know to be a fact for it was often brought to see me squawking and gulping from the tight grip of the small fingers clutched around its throat. It was a hardy little thing and, strange to say, seemed attached to its mistress who lavished

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upon it, I quote her here, her greatest love and care.

Then godmother, so the story runs, surprised the family by unexpectedly coming out to spend the day. By an unhappy coincidence the larder was short, and it does not take a genius to guess what next happened. While the Youthful Pessimist babbled of her pet, the godmother ate the white chicken, now broiled a delicate brown. It was well for the peace of the family that the Youthful Pessimist had not an enquiring nature for she was the sort of impossible child who would have refused to see the wisdom of such an arrangement. However, she never owned another chicken.

On the way to the hen house I stopped by the kitchen to speak to Patsy, Ratiús' wife. She told me that O-Phelia was coming to visit me, although, of course, she did not put it quite so baldly. I am afraid that O-Phelia has fallen on evil days. Two years ago her husband, a gingerbread nigger, was "Odained" and, as a natural result, climbed to high places in the religious societies of his church. He was caught in the act of absconding with the money of the societies and is now serving his time in the North Carolina penitentiary. O-Phelia has decided to return to her native state, and most naturally desires a shelter beneath her broth-

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er's roof. Ratius never fancied his sister, and this is my only hope and chance of escaping from O-Phelia's obvious intention of becoming a boarder who pays no board.

I can never understand why Patsy married Ratius, and yet she has explained to me many times that black men make better husbands. In spite of her amplitude, Patsy is a fine-looking woman with clear amber skin and really wonderful eyes. Ratius worships her and is as dough in her hands. She has never had any children and, while not a young woman, has almost a girlish freshness and vivacity.

As I was talking to her, I saw out of the corner of my eye that so far the speckled chicken was not happy. It stood against the trellis, sheltered by the vines from the pelting rains, with one foot tucked under its wing, and there was a distrustful aloofness about its attitude. Leaving my dripping umbrella on Patsy's porch, I took some scraps of corn pone in my hand and tempted it with food. It ate warily and with a careful eye to its surroundings. As soon as it becomes more sociable, I shall place it in the settlement.

I can't remember when I have seen the aristocrats in better condition. They fairly radiated prosperity and high living. Ratius had a setting of bantam eggs, and thirteen out of the

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fifteen hatched. Ratius is very jubilant over this. He says bantams have a great habit of leaving their nests to scrap with their neighbors, or friends perhaps, and then, with a dawning sense of duty, wandering around and setting on any old egg they happen to find. Meanwhile the half-hatched eggs cool off and it is simply a case of the survival of the fittest. The chicks are the dearest little things. I longed for the Youthful Pessimist and found it hard to leave them in spite of a growing feeling of dampness.

I was on Ratius' porch again when I caught sight of the black rooster and asked Ratius why he supposed it had not crowed this morning? He mumbled something and looked at Patsy and I saw that she had scorched the front of the shirt she was ironing for him.

"Is it sick?" I asked.

"No," he managed to get out as if in a trance and, all unreprieved, Patsy proceeded to scorch the sleeve of the shirt.

I lost patience then and there and demanded again just why the rooster did not crow. For a colored person Ratius turned almost white. He jerked his finger toward Patsy.

"He crow too much. She cut his beak off," he whispered.

For a minute I saw red and even now I do

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not know just what I did say to the pair of them; but I knew that they cowered beneath the hail of my words. My collar band began to grow too tight for me and I realized that I was in a greater rage than I had ever been in my boyhood days. I commanded them to kill the chicken at once and dispose of it as they liked for I would starve sooner than eat a piece of it. Then I took my umbrella and went savagely out into the garden.

I felt too hot and wrathful to go to the house, but headed for a bench beneath the thick trees where I would be hidden from view. "Cut his beak off." I had only to repeat the words to fall into a perfect ecstasy of temper. It seemed to me that I could never like Patsy again and, as for eating her food, faugh, the thought sickened me.

I had been sitting there some little while when I discovered that something or somebody was pushing its way through the wet undergrowth, and I was astonished to see Ip ooze, as it were, out of the muddy ground. He stood looking at me as if in explanation, and I said thickly out aloud, "Cut his beak off, Ip, cut his beak off."

I have found out that Ip has a soul. No human being could have shown his sympathy more unobtrusively. He stretched out his long

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uncouth body and licked my hand just once as if in response to my words, and his eyes entreated that he might not be classed with the perpetrators of such a deed. Then he crouched down at my feet, his tail still, his head between his paws and together we mourned a while.

When I went to the house, it developed that I was wet and somewhat hoarse.

CHAPTER VI

MY SICK SPELL

I WAS ill some days before I finally did go to bed. I wanted to give up sooner, but could not bear to hear Roger's self satisfied, "I told you so, sir." I knew he was watching me like a hawk and I did the best I could to preserve my self respect. Surreptitiously I dosed myself with tablets and powders, but all to no avail. I sickened slowly under Roger's anxious eye and my slight cold gave way to a cough with the happy addition of a hot fever before I was even aware of the fact that what I had was bronchitis with no complications.

I remember well my last breakfast. How I strove to conceal my illness and suffered in so doing. As usual the table was on the porch, and it was with almost a sensation of positive disgust that I approached my morning meal. Patsy has done some masterly cooking since the rooster episode, and my breakfast should have tempted the most fastidious. I steered

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myself into a chair and attacked my melon. It was deliciously cold and I was unnaturally hot, so it was not the effort I expected it to be. It was the day for waffles and syrup and, when I saw a plate of four and my usual egg placed beside me, I became almost panicky. I took two, as is my custom, and made an elaborate pretense of buttering and syruping them. Then I drank a glass of cold tea at one gulp and glanced at Roger who was pretending not to notice me.

"More tea," I said and nibbled at a small piece of waffle. I must say that I am both quick and ingenious for, even as Roger turned his back, I grasped the tip end of my stick, slid it over the table, caught the hooked handle in the wires of the old-fashioned door bell and jerked the whole toward me. The bell rang noisily. It would appear we had an early caller.

Roger is a great stickler for prompt attention to the bell and he left the porch at once. Then I proceeded to make haste quickly. Taking the egg from the cup and two waffles from the plate, I hurried to the side of the porch where I dropped them neatly into the hydrangea bushes. Regaining my stick, I sat down again and, conquering a decidedly dizzy inclination to fall over the side of my chair,

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was able, when Roger returned, to enquire if the postman had already come. Roger replied that it was not the postman and I saw his astonished gaze rove over my plate and rest upon my empty egg cup. Of course I should have left the shell.

He disappeared shortly on his own account, but I stayed where I was and, when he came back, he found me still staring at the breakfast table. He leant over me and spoke very distinctly and slowly. "Your bed is ready, sir," he said, and I replied equally politely and carefully, "Thank you, Roger, then I will go up."

I took the arm Roger offered me, got out of my chair with difficulty and up the steps with even more difficulty. Once in my room Roger deftly put me to bed and then hurried to the phone and called up next door and Sellars. He simply said that I was going to have a sick spell and I thought it rather gentlemanly of him not to mention that I had caught cold playing about the hen houses.

The mother of the Youthful Pessimist appeared almost immediately and seated herself by the window. She gently chided me for getting sick in much the same tone of voice that she had chided me many years ago for my sweet unreasonableness in desiring her to become my

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wife. Looking at her now, with the calm eyes of affection, I must confess that Anne senior or "Old Anne," as her husband calls her, showed her strong common sense when she so carefully poured cold water upon my ardent affections. Her literalness and my weed-like imagination would no more have mixed than the proverbial oil and water. It is, I believe, the privilege of every single person to theorize on the subject of married life and my pet and well worn hobby is congeniality. With similar interests I contend the two lives should become as one and this, coupled with a little give and take, ought to secure a fair amount of earthly happiness.

"Old Anne" is generous and I am a niggard. She would have given herself unreservedly, and I should have hidden from her sight the second self, partly because she would not have understood and partly because I desire a private plaything, a little rill of my own screened from prying eyes by lacey vines and shrubbery. Either we would have become a humdrum couple or Anne would have developed a backwater on her own account. I never try to speculate further than this, but it is obvious that I was not intended for matrimony.

"Old Anne" in her present capacity suits me admirably and she does not need protests from

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me to prove my warm affection. She is still generous and has shared the Youthful Pessimist with me as kindly as if the three little boys had lived. I thought of all this as I watched her sitting there. They have been a happy couple, my dear and near neighbors, and the loss of their children has but drawn them more closely together. I repeat, "Old Anne" showed a wisdom beyond her years.

When Sellars did arrive, he proved himself a tyrant and painstaking enough to satisfy the critical eyes of Anne senior. She only knows him slightly and prefers an older man, but my old doctor of the lindens died a year ago, and I have been clever enough not to get sick since that time. Of course, Sellars said it would have been better had I given up immediately. I expected this. It goes with the stock phrase, "The appendix burst the instant it was removed." There are certain things that you learn intuitively and one is that a young doctor is a weighty individual and needs careful handling. I say, with bated breath, there is a deal both to learn and unlearn in medicine.

Sellars was tremendously in earnest and attacked my case in words four syllables long. After he had blown off his first steam, I said to him witheringly, "I had no idea you were

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such a bully." Whereupon he installed Miss Perrin.

Here again I differ from most men. I do not fancy a trained nurse. I do not like a soothing manner and, above all, I will not have my face washed by any woman. If I am unable to attend to this small detail myself there is always Roger who likewise does not fancy trained nurses.

Miss Perrin was useful. She was quick and capable and added immensely to my comfort for, though not dangerously ill, I was at times slightly delirious and babbled of the Imaginary Listener in a way that alarmed my careful young doctor. While I did not mind this part of my illness, I became bored as I began to improve and, in the light of a comrade, Miss Perrin was a lamentable failure. I have never met a more unresponsive person nor one to whom I gave as much and from whom extracted as little. She received my sallies with cold, heavy dignity. Her yea was yea, her nay, nay and yet she did not look as stupid as she seemed. Roger relieved her during the day and was secretly delighted that I had not fallen a victim to her charms. I must have been a most disagreeable patient for, as the four walls grew on my nerves, I daily became more peevish and faultfinding. I was planning

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how best to get rid of Miss Perrin when the letter arrived. As Roger always insists on my overlooking the mail, he handed the letter to me, although it was plainly addressed to Miss Adelaide Perrin. I gave it over to its rightful owner and, watching her read it, was conscious that after all my nurse was rather a fine looking woman in a large, rawboned style.

I did not enjoy my morning paper. Miss Perrin has an even if monotonous voice, but that day she read in a jerky and uncertain fashion as though she were groping for the next word and, even when she found it, did not understand its meaning. I fidgetted uneasily under the strain of listening to her and was glad when the job was over. As I half closed my eyes, I fancied that her hands trembled as she folded the newspaper neatly together but, as she seemed to be absolutely devoid of nerves, I judged this was an optical illusion on my part. I had just settled down to sleep, my only means of killing time, when Miss Perrin said, "Mr. Wilkes I wish to ask a favor of you." I suppose I stiffened involuntarily for she hastened to add, "Do not hesitate to refuse if it is not perfectly convenient to you."

She began by assuring me that what she was about to do was absolutely unprofessional and

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that, if any one heard of it, it would greatly work against her. Hence she begged of me not to mention it to Sellars. The truth was she was in urgent need of money and wanted me to pay her what she had already earned. This seemed reasonable enough, but I should have granted any request when I found that the shaking hands were not an optical illusion on my part, but an actual fact, to my mind, a deplorable fact. She brought my check book to me and I had the indelicacy to try to over-pay her, an offer that she courteously but firmly refused.

Later on she deemed it advisable to explain more fully about the money. Their farm was mortgaged and a payment was due. She had to help out. That was all. They lived in a little hamlet, some thirty miles from the city, and the same family had owned the farm and homestead for over a hundred years. Lately the ground had become so impoverished it would hardly seem that farming paid. I tried to show her that, with a little care and a great deal of fertilizer, the ground could be made fruitful again, and she became more expansive and casually introduced me to her family, dad and Grandad Perrin, mother, Rosebud and Zeb. She appeared somewhat indifferent to dad and Grandad Perrin, but for the rest

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she exhibited a fierce tenderness of which she was partly proud and partly ashamed. I was surprised to find out that after all she was a human being and not a well-drilled machine as I had at first supposed.

I started the next day with a new interest, namely Perrins. We discussed trained nursing as a profession and I saw at once how impossible it was to get ahead of the game. There were your clothes, your room, your meals when you were not working, and it was not always possible to get a job, and lastly, the largest of any, there were your kith and kin always ready and waiting to pull your leg. As we have stated before, Miss Perrin was not an orphan. She gave grandad his chew, helped dad with the mortgage, paid Rosebud a monthly stipend to stay at home and partially clothed mother and Zeb. I began to see something fine about my nurse. She put up a brave front against seemingly the most overwhelming odds and did it as a matter of course and made no parade of her virtues.

I was in favor of letting Rosebud study to be a nurse if she so wished to do, but Miss Perrin explained that, not only was the work hard, but Rosebud was both young and pretty and too inexperienced as yet to realize the difficulties of the position. Though women were

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harder to nurse than men, it was exceedingly pleasant not to be annoyed by cheap attentions such as the men tossed to you. She, herself, was always most careful, especially with elderly men. All this was most humiliating to me for I saw at once that, in the beginning, I had been labeled dangerous, a wolf in sheep's clothing; but I put a bold face upon the matter and looked upon these speeches in the nature of an apology.

I also recognized the advisability of Rosebud marrying her farmer beau who, though somewhat cumbersome, was well to do and quite the man of the neighborhood. I wished I had a motor that I might drive out and inspect these people with my own eyes and I added them to my Xmas list as it was plainly impossible to give Miss Perrin anything at any other time of the year. I would get the Youthful Pessimist to help me and we would make up a box with clothes and food for every one, a Christmas dinner with trimmings. I proved to Miss Perrin that it was better and cheaper to buy wearing apparel after the Xmas sales and then I mentally planned a complete outfit for Zeb and spent the rest of the time finding out the exact height and width of my soon to be protégés.

Ratius brought Patsy to see me and, after

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a few abrupt inquiries as to my health, vanished leaving behind him his weeping and terrified wife. Patsy believed that I was still angry with her about the black rooster and she implored me to forgive her and for my own sake to try to eat more. I had hard work persuading her that my lack of appetite was illness not anger. I must have said a great deal to Patsy that day for she assured me that never again would she hurt any living animal, with a great stress upon the living, and now she even permitted Ip to track up her kitchen floor. I promised to forgive her absolutely whereupon she threw her apron over her head and wept for joy she said.

Sellars has taken good care of me and is much pleased with my steady improvement. He showed me a letter to-day from the Youthful Pessimist who, I am afraid, does not always trust her very best friends. She was uneasy lest I might be iller than they said and wanted to come home if I were lonesome or needed her. She knew that Sellars would tell her the exact truth and she would abide by his decision.

I think that Sellars was gratified at the confidence she placed in him for I saw him put the letter in his pocket again, although it was plainly marked "answered" on the envelope.

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The dear little Youthful Pessimist. I can feel the warm tears gush to my eyes at the thought of her simple letter. She would come if I were lonesome or needed her. I do not doubt that. Verily I believe, and I so wished it, she would hold my hand while I struggled with King Death himself. Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, could do no more.

Although I do not need her, I shall keep Miss Perrin an extra week. She is a woman and therefore needs a helping hand.

CHAPTER VII

VISITORS

AT last clothed and in my right mind I am down on my lower porch again. As I look about me, I can hardly believe my good fortune and undoubtedly it is a fair day: nature's most critical judge would admit that. When I gazed at the waving branches of the trees, a great contentment came over me and I felt myself grow stronger with each breath of warm, sun-kissed air. Roger bustled about me anxiously, stuck a pillow here, put a footstool there, and I knew it was good to be up and doing once more.

For some days past the visitors have been knocking at my front door demanding admittance and, when my neighbors on my west saw that I was taking a sun bath, they immediately sent a delegation to call on me. George, the older delegate, is nine, and a good-looking precocious child of the womanish type that I cannot bear. He brought with him Mike, a silent, square five-year-old, who is content with his

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role of patient listener to his brother's flow of brilliant conversation. George took possession of the hammock and Mike sat on the steps with his hands folded in his lap and a far away look on his chubby face. I wondered what his thoughts were, while George talked smoothly of my health, the weather, my chickens and, last but not least, of his own prowess and achievements.

"Mike," I somewhat rudely interrupted George, "I hear Mary Jane is dead?"

"How did you hear that?" George asked wiggling in his seat while Mike nodded and took up the conversation thusly:

"Mary Jane was alive last week and now she's dead and Mary Jane would not drink any water, and George said she must. He put the bowl in her cage and she wouldn't drink and George took her by the head and he held her down and he held her down and he held her down——"

"She ought to drink sometimes," George said sullenly, but I waved him to be silent, and Mike went on with his tale.

"And George took her by the head and he held her down and he held her down and he held her down——"

"What happened then?" I inquired gently.

"And George took her by the head," Mike

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answered firmly, "and he held her down and he held her down and he held her down and she was drowned."

"We have a stuffed rabbit now," George put in while I stared at him with unmitigated disgust.

Just at this juncture Mrs. Catchings appeared and George slid nimbly to his feet, said they must go and vanished even as I should have liked to do. Although I do not care for George, he is a clever child, and I should have liked to have him as an ally in my encounter with Mrs. Catchings.

This lady makes no secret of her devotion to me. She talks of it from door to door and in the market place and, had I died, she would have been chief mourner at my funeral with a sob in her throat and a tear in her eye. I squirm uneasily under this open affection and sometimes wonder if it is possible for an adult to be married without his own free will and consent. She is an endless gossip and constantly tells me small items about my friends, little disagreeable things that prick like a pine point. There is always a bitter pill within her sugar-coated pellets of scandal.

While she inquired effusively after my bronchitis, she absent mindedly held my hand quite a while after she had shaken it. She kept her

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eyes fixed on my face as she recounted the latest chit chat of the day and I knew all the time she was mentally repeating, "Poor old man, he's breaking fast, he's breaking fast." Yet I was not prepared for the pin prick when it came.

"I am glad Anne is having a little trip," she smiled sweetly at me. I assented and she went on. "She was looking so-o-o badly I thought."

"I do not think she looks badly," said I combatively whereupon she shook her head sadly and trickled in her syrupy fashion, "Dear Mr. Wilkes, between ourselves, I do not consider Anthony is worth a good night's sleep, do you?"

I did not reply and she launched into an account of Anthony's career with a chorus girl and inferred that, in consequence, Anne was losing flesh daily. I kept quiet with difficulty and was glad to welcome the Wainwright girls and, though Mrs. Catchings did her best, she found herself unable to outsit them.

I admire the Wainwright girls immensely and always give them the cherries off my trees. They put up and sell preserves and fruit cake and will take an order on the shortest possible notice. They talked of their prospects for the coming winter and I, then and there, be-

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spoke a large-sized fruit cake for an Xmas present for the Chance Acquaintance. They are down on my Xmas list for substantial gifts, and it is due to their industry that I possess so large a collection of cross-stitched pillows. When the Wainwrights talk of their blessings in so thankful a spirit, I know myself to be an ingrate, and a visit from them always puts me in a chastened and an humble frame of mind.

Priscilla, the eldest and plainest of the girls, has a beau by the name of Thomas Corner, who, by the irony of chance, is as poor and as worthy as she is. It distresses me that these two young people cannot afford to marry and, seeing that fate intends to have no finger in the pie, I have taken it upon myself to bring about this match. No knight in quest of the Holy Grail ever labored more conscientiously than I have in search of a job for Thomas Corner. Though not clever, he is a steady young man, honest and kind hearted, but I have yet to discover the position that is exactly suited to his capacity. Father Wainwright also approves of Corner and surrounded, though not submerged, by his five strapping daughters and chirpy little wife has the appearance of a solitary, but enthusiastic bather who calls out lustily to the passer by, "Come on in, the water's fine."

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When the Wainwrights left, I was depressed as I knew I should be and was glad to see Molly Brighton. She is a great chum of the Youthful Pessimist's and her exact opposite in every respect. She wears rubber heels, stiff collars, mannish shirts and, I have even heard rumored, pajamas at night, though it does not behoove a bachelor to allude to such things. If she sews, and she is never idle, she places glasses upon her fine roman nose and these, combined with a tolerant manner, give her a decidedly motherly outlook upon the world at large.

It is this manner I think that appeals to the Youthful Pessimist for, when I question her as to this friendship, she says that in time of trouble, literally and figuratively, Molly is a good prop upon which to lean. Probed further to define the word trouble, she says vaguely, "Oh, the dentist and such like." I begged Molly to stay to luncheon and she agreed and made herself most pleasant and companionable. I spoke of Anthony and she said thoughtfully that she was inclined to believe the story about the chorus girl was true and then, as we were not gossips, we let the matter drop.

Sellars came in to pay me a professional visit and stayed quite a time, though Molly

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had the lack of tact to talk entirely about the Youthful Pessimist. As I do not wish her shoved down Sellar's throat, I tried to stop Molly, but all to no avail. At my comical look of despair he burst into laughter, much to Molly's surprise, and, out of the spirit of mischief, encouraged her in her talk. He shook hands heartily with her at her departure and confided to me that she was a downright, sensible girl and he was glad to know her.

I had Roger pack up a half a dozen jars of jam for him to give to his poor worthy patients. It is only by methods like these that I am able to empty my storeroom shelves and give fresh orders to the Wainwright girls. I have the reputation of possessing the sweetest tooth in town.

I cannot get Mrs. Catchings' conversation out of my mind. The pinprick is still there. Anthony has been hanging about the Youthful Pessimist some four years. If she wanted him, why has she not taken him seriously in his many proposals? I never fancied Anthony, but I cannot bear the town to say that he has discarded the Youthful Pessimist for a chorus girl. Mrs. Catchings' face rose before me, I mean the face she wore when the Wainwright girls blocked her little game of making a genuine pincushion of me. Mike's story might be

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applicable to her. "And he held her down and he held her down and he held her down and she was drowned." Only unfortunately she was not drowned, but would be around again to bait me further. After all she had extracted nothing from me. I chuckled at the comforting thought, and Roger asked me what was the matter.

"Nothing, Roger," I answered, "but always remember he held her down, he held her down, he held her down," and, leaving him much mystified, I got into bed.

CHAPTER VIII

MY BIRTHDAY

I AM sixty-one years old to-day and I cannot forget it if I would for Roger appeared bright and early in the morning to wish me many happy returns of the day and to present his usual gift, a pot of ferns for my breakfast table. He goes out in the country to dig up these ferns, plants them himself, brings them home carefully under his arm and smuggles them into the house beneath my unsuspecting nose. He usually does this the Sunday afternoon before my birthday, but if it rains or anything happens to prevent, later on in the week he respectfully asks for a day off on a matter of important business.

At breakfast Ratius placed before me a dozen eggs secured by him this morning and all plainly dated July the twenty-sixth. He bid me feel that they were still warm, but privately I do not consider this is unnatural when you think of the weather and how difficult it is, outside of a refrigerator, to keep even rea-

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sonably comfortable. Happenings like this make me realize that the age of miracles has not passed, for this is the one and only time in the year when Ratus finds a dozen fresh eggs before I have had my morning meal. I am divided between admiration for my settlement hens who are undoubtedly sagacious fowls and admiration for Ratus who, by the aid of a simple lead pencil, has done away with the lack of a few insignificant eggs. Though I have not yet seen Patsy, I can hear her singing in the kitchen as she beats the batter for my birthday cake and the smell of "Old Anne's" ham gives me an anticipatory thrill of the gastronomic feats I must accomplish before night falls.

Patsy and I never agree about the cake. She is in favor of one of those white frosted affairs, so prevalent at christenings and weddings, and I insist on a chocolate layer cake as a delicious and suitable accompaniment to my home-made peach ice cream. To silence Patsy's protests I permit her to make herself a yearly birthday cake and, though she varies the month of her birth, she never varies her cake. I do not think Patsy really knows her age or else she is older than she looks and likes to forget that disagreeable fact.

She always calls upon me to deal with the census man and, though singular it is true that

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this year neither my maid nor my men servants could give their correct ages, but each one knew almost to a nicety the exact hour of my birth. Patsy explained to her own satisfaction that her sister up north attended to all that and was vastly outraged when Ratius would have put her down as forty years of age. To preserve peace I settled in favor of thirty-five whereupon Ratius, who was in a truculent mood, went off muttering that, "Patsy warn't nobody's spring chicken." I am trying to persuade Patsy to take September as her birth month. Eggs are not so valuable then and Patsy will not, under any circumstances, make a small cake.

I have not always celebrated my birthday, though, until my mother's death, the twenty-sixth of July and I were on the most intimate terms. Then, with the glorious arrogance of youth, I made him many promises of wondrous deeds I would perform before he saw fit next to visit me. Needless to say, I did not live up to my words yet, despite this fact, curiously enough, continued to pile Ossa upon Pelion until there dawned a dark and dreary day when I realized that my youth was gone and I was a braggart and a middle-aged man. It was then I began to shun the twenty-sixth and, after a fashion, contrived partially to forget him.

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Occasionally, for very shame, I looked about me to see what might be done to placate my one time friend, but the years hurried by so swiftly that I found it impossible to even sit upon the coat tails of the days and so, in despair, I gave up my futile efforts.

It was the Youthful Pessimist who wrought the change in me. When scarcely more than a child, she became conscience struck at her selfishness in monopolizing all the birthdays, and we planned an informal supper, my only guests, my next door neighbors. I am often amused at the chameleon-like nature of the Youthful Pessimist. In her own home she is the child of the house, spoiled, but not spoilt, and is looked upon as a happy hearted irresponsible being. She has only to step beneath the rose arches to change into a competent adviser upon the most intricate questions, an expounder of wisdom, worldly or otherwise, and an altogether fit and delightful companion for that aged gentleman, Timothy Wilkes. It is she who has made me look forward to my birthday and has enabled me to stand upright before the twenty-sixth of July and, for that matter, keep on my hat if I so wish to do.

The Youthful Pessimist is away this year and that is why I feel so little enthusiasm about the planting of my tree. It also accounts for

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my frequent trips to the letter box and, if it were not so foreign to his nature, lately I would swear Roger has watched me with a malicious grin when I returned to my seat disappointed and empty handed. For the last five years she has written me a birthday letter because she asserts she is a poor shy creature and cannot be as demonstrative as she feels and, should the day pass without my having heard from her, I should indeed be certain that a great calamity had befallen me.

I planted the tree as she had suggested, not very far from the crepe myrtle bush. Although it has two seasons' growth, it will be many years before it will keep any sun from either of my porches. It is so new and young, it has rather a forlorn and lonely look among my sedate and well grown trees, and I trust one of my motherly lindens will take it under her protection. Just as the last earth had been well pressed down, Sellars came for me and we both said it was not as hot as we expected it to be.

Sellars is helping me out of quite a singular quandary. I think I have mentioned before how dearly my mother loved her wooden baby, and I will now tell you that, as the years rolled by and no more children, wooden or otherwise, came to oust me from my stronghold, she con-

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ceived the idea of expressing her gratitude for this her only son by substantially aiding some poor being less fortunate than herself. Being pious by nature she named it a thank offering, but I, a doubting Thomas, strongly suspect it was a simon pure burnt offering. Call it as you will, the result was the same, a donation of fifty dollars to some poor but worthy child who was lucky or unlucky enough to be born on my birthday. She very sensibly stipulated that the child was not to be named after me else I fear there would have been a Timothy Wilkes in every quarter of the town. She managed to get a great deal of pleasure from this simple gift, and, to her death, more or less followed up her young protégés.

I have kept up the donation, not from any religious motives I am sorry to say, but partly as a memorial to my dear mother and partly as an act of commiseration for some little girl or boy who has yet to battle with a life long of twenty-sixth of Julys.

Up to this year I have been besieged with applications for the money. Now it would appear there is a dearth of babies or perhaps the twenty-sixth of July has been discarded in favor of some more desirable day. Sellars has been very eager for me to help one of his patients and phoned me last night that by morn-

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ing he would have ready for me my birthday baby. To-day he insists I must see the child, some few hours old, and wants me to know the mother, a seamstress whose husband died a few months ago.

I have never seen two cleaner rooms than those into which we were ushered nor yet a sweeter faced girl, for indeed she was little more, than this poor seamstress mother. She thanked me most gratefully for the money and would have said more had she not noticed my obvious embarrassment. Sellars was restlessly anxious for me to see the baby, and it was a nice daintily shaped little creature.

"It happens to be named Anne," he volunteered and, since I saw he was plainly bent on amusing me, I began to compare it to the Youthful Pessimist. However, it made me restless and eager to get back to see if my letter had come and I am afraid I was rather a distraught companion on the homeward drive.

The letter was not in the box, but was on my table at lunch time, an express package was in my chair. As they have been here three days, Roger did wear a malicious grin after all and, since the diabolical cunning he has shown in bringing this into my house, without my knowledge, I shall always know that he wishes me to see the fern dish that he fills for my

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birthday present. The Youthful Pessimist had sent the things to him and directed him not to let me see them before lunch time.

Before I had untied the string, I knew the contents of the express package. It represented three years work on the part of the Youthful Pessimist and even then I shrewdly judged that Molly Brighton, who taught her the stitch, did the lion's share. It was a knitted slumber robe for my bed with a blue center and a wonderful border of gray and varying shades of blue woven together. The note turned out to be a poem and was, as she said, suitable for the occasion. It was headed, "Lines Written On the Birthday of Timothy Wilkes," and read as follows:

I

Dear Tim, I have expressed to you,
A simple little gift;
And, if you do not like it, I
Intend to get quite miffed.

2

The blue, perhaps, is not as fresh
As once it might have been,
But kindly note the border, sir:
You'll find that neat and clean.

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3

And now, to tell to you the truth,
Though 'tis a crying sin,
I do not like to visit here,
Among my kith and kin.

4

It is not that they are not kind,
I find no fault in that.
It's only that I'm getting bored,
And also getting fat.

5

At first I borrowed Cousin's books,
And sat me down to read;
But now a sty adorns the eye
Of which I stood in need.

6

And so I take a rocking-chair,
And rock and rock and rock,
Until I think the neighbors must
Hear me around the block.

7

I wish I were at home to-night,
To cut the birthday cake.
The thought of all you cunning dears
Gives me a homesick ache.

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8

But, Tim, there's one thing you must know,
In all this big, wide land,
There's no one loves you half so well
As your poor, foolish Anne.

I do not know of anything that has pleased me as much as the doggerel of the Youthful Pessimist and I should like to show it to her mother if it were not her relatives that Anne is visiting. It was a great temptation yet I resisted manfully and at supper that night only quoted such parts as were suited to a mother's ears.

A triangle is not always a desirable arrangement. It may have been the absence of the Youthful Pessimist but, for the first time, I felt a little bit out of the center of things. Save for the loving effusion within my coat pocket, I might even have felt a thought chilly and lonesome. The arrival of the birthday cake, resplendent with the familiar twenty-one candles, only served to remind me that later I should undoubtedly suffer some pangs of discomfort from having, as my mother old-fashionedly put it, "Over eaten, my son, of too many indigestible sweeties."

I think sometimes, most unconsciously, married couples have a real knack of making you

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feel awkward and out of place in the conversation. It is a natural and not altogether unavoidable mistake on their part. With common aims and desires it is hard for them to realize the whole world is not at one with their point of view, and so it was with my two dear birthday guests. If they reminisced, they renewed the love affair of their youth in which, as you know, I cut but a sorry figure. If they spoke of the present, they banded more closely together against the encroachments of Father Time, while I, a bachelor, stood defenseless and alone. If they dallied with the future, here again I was at a disadvantage, for was I not childless and had they not the Youthful Pessimist? Beside their full and even life mine appeared but a starved and pinchbeck existence. Like any gambler I had chanced everything on a single throw of the dice. I had builded my all on the Youthful Pessimist. For me she had been sister, wife, daughter and friend. Without her, I should, indeed, be desolate as I groped my way through the painful valley of old age and yet, sooner or later, most young things find a mate and I should not wish it otherwise with the Youthful Pessimist.

I had in my mind a very cunning plan to bind Anne's husband to me with a golden mesh. The house and garden was the price I would

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pay for his respect if not his liking and, at my death, they would pass unreservedly into the hand of the Youthful Pessimist. But supposing he had no fancy for my golden bait, as would be true in the case of Anthony who will inherit a home of his own, a mammoth and moneyed pile of bricks and mortar. I have not forgotten Mrs. Catchings' words. Aye, the pin pricks, is pricking still. I know now that I have always planned for the Youthful Pessimist to have my garden just as "Old Anne" and her husband have planned that eventually their home will become hers. I claim first consideration should be shown me. Since she has been old enough to express a wish, no tree nor shrub has been planted upon my grounds without due consultation with her. Her ghost haunts my winding pathways, the tap of her high-heeled boots is ever in my ears and the tossing treetops waft her light laughter to me a thousand times a day.

Like a subterranean stream, these thoughts flowed swiftly through my mind while I manfully played my part as host of my birthday supper. I do not think my guests noticed my abstraction, and it was the father of the Youthful Pessimist who broke in upon my lethargy. At leaving he held me forcibly in my chair and said humorously, "Come, Old Anne, there's

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one thing you've overlooked, Timothy's birthday kiss."

I am sure the Youthful Pessimist inherits her sweetness from her mother, for, much to her husband's surprise, "Old Anne" kissed me on my forehead as kindly as my own mother might have done and whispered, "Dear Tim, every night I thank the good God for having given us so true and kind a friend."

I ought never to feel lonely again. "Old Anne" it seems has two sides, one for her husband and one for her friend. I shall walk with my neighbors through the valley of old age.

I had indigestion that night as I knew I should. In my nightmare I dreamed that the Youthful Pessimist was married and that the pair of them were wandering hand in hand about my garden. I could not see the man's face, but he had a fine physique, and I knew it was not Anthony after all and was partly comforted. I have decided to bequeath my estate to the Youthful Pessimist, provided she consents to live in my house [with alterations if she so wishes], and, if possible, keeps up my garden. No sane man could refuse so reasonable an offer.

CHAPTER IX

MY SUMMER TRIP

I AM going to the seashore again this year and the very thought of the ocean makes the old blood stir in my veins much as though I were a real flesh and blood individual and not a sawdust imitation of a man. That I might not lose any of the pleasures of anticipation I have been packing my trunk for the last week and have taken out and replaced my things some half a dozen times. When I am not doing this, I am mooning on my porch with a pipe between my lips and a bit of imaginary salt spray dimming my eye glasses.

The Youthful Pessimist has come home and has helped me in my selection of a new summer suit. I always get a blue serge, but this year it has a faint white line through it that gives me a jaunty and not unpleasantly youthful appearance. The Youthful Pessimist is going to the mountains with her parents, so neither of us will feel the slight sadness of a summer's

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parting and we shall have many confidences to exchange in the Fall.

I have another pleasure to look forward to in my this year's outing. For two weeks the Chance Acquaintance will be at my hotel and we shall sit side by side again and discuss the wisdom of the ages. I wonder if either of us has changed greatly in the last twelve months and if, as before, she is still outside the haven of the commonplace. We have carried on a somewhat desultory correspondence but it has served its purpose. Our lives will touch again this summer and I shall be the gainer by this happy arrangement.

I know that I had a hot and disagreeable railroad trip yet so keenly alive was I with pleasurable excitement I hardly noticed the discomforts of my journey. What's all this fuss about the seashore, you query, and I withdraw into my shell somewhat out of conceit with you and your question and fall back upon the ever ready Imaginary Listener. It was he who suggested driving to my hotel by the ocean front instead of through the village and so I breathed my first draught of salt air through the windows of a ramshackle bus and, on my first arrival, feasted my eyes on the beauteous ocean itself.

Every year when I am attacked by rheuma-

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tism and lumbagoish pains I say to myself like this, "Make the most of your ocean trips, you cannot enjoy them many more seasons," and every year finds me again at the same old spot with all the zest of a schoolboy on a frolic. And yet I have no grudge against the mountains and almost feel a real affection for the misty far-off peaks. I have been somewhat disconcerted to find that my fancy for them is entirely because they remind me of distant bodies of water. Again, however, I repeat, I have no grudge against the mountains.

I think Thompson, of our church, would be greatly shocked if he could hear the advice given me by the Imaginary Listener. He considers that nature is the best of preachers and as this fits in nicely with my own tastes and desires, I, naturally, am often swayed by his judgment. It is undoubtedly true that by steadily staring at the shifting waves I have acquired a quaint moral benefit. To my mind the ocean so neatly illustrates the scheme of life and so efficaciously silences the whys and wherefors of our existence upon this sphere. The countless waves and wavelets are but the millions and billions of human beings all rolling shoreward to apparently aimlessly break and rebreak upon the shoals and sands of an everyday life. At the turn of the tide, the Lord

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and Master of all gathers them together again in his large and capable hand only to repeat the performance with, to the naked eye, scarcely a hairbreadth of difference. These waves but small splashes of water by themselves have contrived to beat the shifting sand into firm, well-packed beaches; have ground and reground the unsightly stones beneath their depths until they are presented to the world tinted and polished pebbles and, in many cases, have even changed the hard, rocky face of old Mother Nature herself. I take it that our attempts in this life may lead to like results. Individually we may have failed but collectively we may not only have justified our existence upon this sphere but have proved a glorification to our creator.

In my imaginary conversations with Thompson I talk very freely of my occasional moments of exaltation and literally lay bare my soul before his critical eye. I only do this, however, in my imagination, for, if I spoke thus to his face, he would turn so pale that, for fear he would revert again into an ordinary dough ball, I should be sadly tempted to pop him into Patsy's oven and bake him until he was as brown as the skin of a sweet potato. So like the heathen that I am, I glory in my shame and book fashion turn over the days of my month tasting the exquisite delight of each

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hour and yet, strange to say, only half sorry when I come to "Finis" at the bottom of the last page.

At the seashore I make a practice of drifting through the days and only confess to one habit that is more unalterable than the laws of the Medes and Persians. I take a dip before breakfast and, though strongly attached to my cozy naps, nothing but sickness could prevent me from getting this glimpse of the morning sun as it rises majestically from beneath the ocean's rim. I put on a heavy coat over my bathing suit and watch the darting rays shoot up into the somber grayness of the sky and I shiver with delighted appreciation and also, I confess it, with cold. When the sun is high enough to make a pathway across the water, I step into a fairy ocean and gold and silver drops from my fingers as I dive and splash about in the bright light that falls upon my head like a benediction.

There is another old gentleman here who is an early riser and always watches me take my morning bath. He is a scrap of a man, but of a peppery temperament. In the spirit of friendliness I accosted him and urged him to join me in my dip. He waved at me a cane, of which apparently he has no need, and went off like a newly lit popcracker. "Thanks, sir,"

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he said, "but I am not a big enough fool to take my old bones into the ocean before it has been warmed by the midday sun." I appreciated the thrust and went meekly about my business, making a fool of myself.

He must be a sufferer from insomnia, for plainly he does not care for the sunrise. If possible he walks with his face from it and glances persistently inland as if the brightness annoyed rather than pleased him. One morning, when it was unusually splendid, I called his attention to it and all he condescended to say was, "Very fair, I suppose, very fair." "Very fair," indeed! I wonder what the fellow expected, a conflagration or a Vesuvian eruption? To give the devil his due (I am speaking metaphorically, of course), I believed even Thompson would have been more impressed.

My hotel keeper has just come to tell me that to-night the Chance Acquaintance will arrive. I knew this before, but did not dampen his pleasure by loudly announcing that fact. I am making a practice of showing greater consideration to the world at large and am surprised at the number of small opportunities I have at stepping nimbly Heavenward. My hotel keeper made our friendship and, to the best of his poor ability, has watered the growth.

He fidgetted about uneasily and said irrele-

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vantly, "This hotel's a fine place for a honeymoon, Mr. Wilkes."

I agreed with him heartily, though it would never be my fancy for a bridal trip. There is something very secretive about me for I know that if I were going honeymooning, I should never spend a second at a summer resort. No, I should hide my dear one in the heart of a green, green wood with a silver lake and a birchbark canoe for her companions. I should take a guide, Roger, perhaps, for our creature comforts. On me alone should her glances fall and for my ears only should she sing her sweet songs, and so the long days would melt into the longer evenings and, like little children afraid of the dark, we would huddle about our camp fire and, hand in hand, plan our future home. This is a strange fancy on my part, for the only woman I have ever loved, Old Anne, has never in her life been in any boat smaller than an ocean steamer and would be as out of place on a camping expedition as I am now at a social function. I was recalled from these ideas of mine by the hotel keeper's insistent voice, "Then you will come here, Mr. Wilkes?"

"When?" I asked in bewilderment.

"On your honeymoon, sir, of course."

I confess I laughed aloud. Upon my word,

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while I was day-dreaming, he had already married me to the Chance Acquaintance. Poor girl. The idea struck me as so exquisitely ridiculous that I smote my thigh in an ecstasy of merriment. I stopped short at the sight of his hurt face.

"Outside of my little money, why should any woman want to marry me?" I asked.

"Money or no money, there's many a woman would be glad to get a fine looking gentleman like you, Mr. Wilkes," and he retired with dignity into his office and shut the door in my face. I had never thought before that I was fine looking, but I tingled with pride at his compliment. Undoubtedly the blue suit with the white lines was a success after all.

Preening myself like the fatuous idiot I know myself to be, I sauntered to the bathing beach in search of fresh worlds to conquer. There I met my short-tempered friend who suffers with insomnia. He was strolling about the beach and grimly inspecting the antics of the crowd of bathers. He is a solitary person, but, like pepper, has more or less a stimulating effect upon me. My appetite is whetted for more and still more and yet, so far, I do not know his name or upon what country he bestows the dignity of his birth.

The Chance Acquaintance came to supper

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that night and as usual I sat at her table. We met as if we had parted but yesterday, and she opened her fan to show me that she still had with her "her deadly weapon of defense against the mosquitoes." She was the same and yet she was different, not in her manner or voice, but in her appearance. I studied her furtively, in between bites and, to save my life, I could not put my finger upon the alteration. Though her hair was arranged as before and she still wore black, she was vastly different and it worried me that I could not say wherein the change lay. I said good-night to her dissatisfied and took my perplexity to bed with me. Suddenly, as sometimes happens to me, I had a flash of illumination. Formerly she wore her dresses buttoned down the front; to-night, although as neatly and securely put together as before, she was unmistakably buttoned down the back. Why, I wondered, had she made the change.

CHAPTER X

THE CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE

I HAVE spoken to the Chance Acquaintance about the buttons and she actually blushed as she laid the change to the door of that stern ruler, Dame Fashion.

"You were indifferent to her before," I objected.

"Do I not look as well?" she asked with a pretence of anxiety.

"You look as well," I answered picking my words carefully, "but you look more of a woman."

"You surprise me," she laughed and let it rest at that.

She has told me something of her early life. They were of French extraction and for many years lived in Louisiana. Père, as she called her father, owned a plantation and she was his eldest and favorite daughter.

"I was a pretty child," said she with commendable frankness, "but, as you see, I did not fulfill the promise of my youth. My real name

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is Helène though Père always called me 'Kitten' and it did seem that the nickname had come to stay. Luckily for me, I went to boarding school and there the girls took up the chant of Kitten or for short Kitty. I felt the name was out of place and one day climbed upon a chair in Madame's room and looked into the mirror that hung high upon her wall. I had begun to sprout, you see, and was changing rapidly. I had a high color of bright red, the promising beginning of a hooked nose and my bones felt and looked larger than usual. What a fallacy, I thought, anything more unlike a kitten could not be found, so I promptly put a stop to that foolishness. Yet Père, until his death, always insisted upon using that old nickname."

"What are the main characteristics of a kitten?" I inquired.

"Oh, a soft fair creature that will purr when you stroke it. Now I bristle when caressed and am more likely to be mistaken for a hedgehog."

I should never have likened the Chance Acquaintance to a hedgehog. Rather she resembles some woodland animal that has once been caught in a trap and now, with bright distrustful eyes, holds at bay the rest of mankind. It may be true that since I have known her

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better, I look at her with eyes of affection, but I could swear that the harsh redness of her cheeks had softened into a remarkably vivid color and that what had been a tight, hard bud, was at last beginning to bloom into a perfect rose. She talks to me most freely of her life and yet always I have the feeling that she is keeping something from me, just what I cannot conceive.

There is a very pathetic side to our summer friendships. Like Jack's beanstalk they attain their growth in a single night and are as apt to perish as suddenly and as absolutely. They resemble babies insomuch as the crucial test is the second season. Should they safely weather this period, you can begin to delude yourself into thinking that you have gained a friend.

Unlike most people, I do not come to this resort for the sole purpose of making acquaintances. When the warm weather begins, I have a craving for the ocean that I must either gratify or run the risk of facing the winter with parched lips and an unslaked thirst. At such times the sight of even a toy steamboat will bring about the feeling and after that it is simply a question of whether I take a satchel or a dress suitcase. The latter packs better

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but the former is undeniably the easier to carry.

Having made it very clear to you that I am not a pushing person but find my hands quite busy with the second self and the Imaginary Listener; I will now say, without any embarrassment, that, during my many years' stay at this resort, I have made absolutely scores of so-called friends. With all of them my methods have been the same. At Christmas I send the older women the newest novel; the girls, a box of candy, and at Easter I scribble some postal cards with the season's greetings and scatter them broadcast through the land. The candy and the books are simple gifts and arouse no suspicion of romantic and unseemly passion in an aged and infirm old bachelor. The postcard is the great brain-saving invention of the age and is more useful than your own latch-key. It is an open and above board affair and no jealous husband or sweetheart can take objection to its airy persiflage. For the presents I receive letters; for the postcards notes, and I keep up the same line of treatment until one day no letter appears and thus I consider myself at liberty to mentally add that name to the monument I have raised in my mind over those who have departed from my life forever and aye.

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Now and then, in later years, I have happened upon some of those early acquaintances and I have been shocked at the unblushing egotism of my thoughts which run something like this: "What a waste of books or, as the case may be, what a waste of candy."

With the Chance Acquaintance I have pursued a somewhat different course of action and therefore I think she has come to stay. At Christmas I sent her some nice Bernard Shaws and marked my favorite passages; at Easter I mailed her a Maeterlinck that I wanted myself and, if you remember, I have already ordered her a fruit cake from the Wainwright girls. This last gift is not exactly to my taste, as I fancy the Chance Acquaintance would rather gratify her mind than her appetite; still the Wainwright girls must have orders, and of late they have developed the praiseworthy but annoying habit of making me state offhand the person for whom my gift is intended. I shall supplement this gift by a Walter Pater, for I am convinced the Chance Acquaintance has both a quick and well trained brain and I shall continue to feed her with books of such depths that either she will cry out, "Too deep, too deep," or, like the brave lass that she is, strike out herself for fresh worlds to conquer.

I think she likes my small attentions and in

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return she has taken me to her favorite spot on the coast. We took the car to the point and from there picked our way among the piles that evidently had once been the supports of a disused car line. When we had apparently reached the end of everywhere and were about to step into the sea, we rounded the curve of the high embankment by our side and there it lay, a snug nook hollowed out of the sandy hill with a rest for our backs and a single sparse but kindly tree to throw its shadow athwart our hollow. Before us stretched the calm rippling waters, above us hung the blue limitless sky, and within us was that perfect peace that only accompanies true congeniality. I have named this place the Shelter and, if the Chance Acquaintance does not return next year, I shall take it as my own ewe lamb.

She was hugely tickled at the hotel keeper's plan for our honeymoon and instantly asked me what sort of wife she would make.

"It is hard for me to say," I replied thoughtfully, "last year, in that capacity. I should have considered you an impossibility, but since you have become more of a woman——" I stopped for lack of further words.

"You think I might do?" she insinuated gently.

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"You would always be attractive to me even as an impossibility," I murmured vaguely.

"I am sure I should do exceedingly well," she answered with spirit.

"You surprise me," I mimicked and then rather a remarkable thing occurred. She opened her mouth to speak, I saw but could not distinguish the words upon her lips and yet no sounds came forth. Decidedly she is hiding something from me and, although it is probably a trifle, she has, with a woman's knack, fanned my curiosity into a real blaze of interest.

That night, while I slept, my lumbago swooped down upon me and the next morning, after some futile attempts to rise, I rang for the bellboy to bring me the hotel keeper. I bullied the latter into lending me the former and, having crossed his itching palm with silver, I felt at liberty to order him about as I pleased. I moved my bed nearer the window so the view could not escape me if it would. As this was also nearer the bell-rope, I killed two birds with one stone and, in this manner, prepared myself for several lonely days of discomfort. Should this slight touch develop into a real attack of lumbago, I shall telegraph for Miss Perrin in spite of public opinion which is always down on an old man and a trained nurse.

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Cheered by the doctor, a beach friend, who assured me I should be up and about in a day or so, the morning passed away and I was just planning how to dispose of the afternoon when someone knocked upon my door and, on my cordial invitation to "come in," a short, fair man, a stranger so far as I was concerned, slid into the room. I can best describe him as youngish, with a decent pair of gray eyes, a small blonde mustache and a well-bred voice.

"How are you?" he inquired.

"I'm a little stiff, thanks, that's all," I replied primly.

"Hélène sent me," he volunteered.

If the Chance Acquaintance sent him, undoubtedly he must be her brother and the French blood came from her mother's side of the family. Her father must have been a plain every-day American.

"You are her brother?" I said politely.

"No," he answered nervously, "I am her fiancé."

I transfixed the intruder with my steady glance or I should better say my steady glare. So this was what the Chance Acquaintance had been hiding from me, had started to tell me in the shelter and then thought better of it. Moreover, I had sense enough to see that this also accounted for the change of buttons from

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the front to the back, though why this should affect the situation, I failed to understand. If I were married, I should prefer my wife to attend to the buttons herself, not from a spirit of unwillingness, you understand, but because there are some undertakings I should not dare to attempt. The unreliable and diaphanous garments of women were never intended to be handled by the bungling fingers of a mere man.

Another insistent thought crowded its way to the front of my mind. A triangle, as I have said before, leaves some one in the lurch. I saw plainly my summer would not be as pleasant as I expected it to be.

When I did speak, I growled like a dog that had just had a juicy bone jerked from between its paws. "I hope you are good enough for her," I said.

"I shall do my best, sir," he replied politely and bowed himself hastily out of the room.

I shall be forced to add the name of the Chance Acquaintance to the monument of those shades of memory, my summer friends.

CHAPTER XI

HOME AGAIN

AFTER all matters turned out better than I had foreseen. The Chance Acquaintance passed safely through her second season and disqualified herself for a name space on my monument.

I was in my room several days with the lumbago and she came with her fiancé to sit with me. She was apparently entirely indifferent to the scandal that might follow such a proceeding and I felt obliged to remind her that people would talk.

"Are you referring to the cats in the foyer?" she asked contemptuously.

I was referring to the cats who are the usual run of idle women that help to fill a summer hotel and I said so to the Chance Acquaintance.

"Fiddlesticks," retorted she even more contemptuously and went on serenely with her sewing while her fiancé laughed aloud at my surprised but pleased face. They came twice a day, and thrown with them so intimately, I

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grew to know them much better than I do many of the people on my block.

I discovered that the fiancé had a fine mind, all neatly lined with shelves like a bookcase might have and each shelf was labeled and stored with indisputable facts. He was not, in any sense of the word, a bold thinker, still the Chance Acquaintance was intrepid enough for the pair of them and, while he admired her for her clever intuitions, she respected him for the accuracy of his knowledge. He had known her for many years and was the son of one of her tutors on the plantation. He called her "Kitten" and to him she was still the spirited child who was kind to a shy, overgrown boy. The Chance Acquaintance had told him that he owed his happiness to me. Did I not tell her to know and love her fellow men, and was she not literally and absolutely obeying me to the letter? In the future I must be more careful how I sprinkle about my advice.

I did not mind my lumbago while I tilted with the Chance Acquaintance. Generally she put me to flight but, occasionally here and there, I flatter myself I scored a neat point much to the amusement of the fiancé who, good fellow that he was, applauded each of us impartially. She was determined to be my friend and, after I was well, made me accompany them on many

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an expedition. I never went with them to the shelter. It is really suitable to one person but can be stretched to accommodate a couple.

And yet, in spite of the ocean and the Chance Acquaintance, I went home earlier than I had intended to do. It happened in this wise. We had a spell of damp, foggy weather and, though personally I do not object to these gray days, out of consideration for the lumbago I find it safer to survey the fog with a slumber robe wrapped about my spoiled shoulders.

The thin spirals of mist twisted themselves into fantastic shapes. They were like the curling tendrils of a fern, no, they were like the branches of a tree with that larger and more solid bit for a trunk. It was an old tree, wider than its height, and distorted out of all grace of form. At this point of my reverie the window and the fog faded away before my very eyes and were supplanted by my linden trees magnificent in their sturdy strength and splendid greenness. This trick of my imagination brought me around to the Youthful Pessimist. I had a letter from her in my pocket. She was going home in a day or two she wrote and would be glad to get back again. On such simple coincidences do our actions hang. In three days my week would be up. To go or not to go, that was the question?

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Obedying a foolish impulse I took down from the shelf my suitcase and dusted it carefully. That night I put all superfluous clothing into my trunk and paid my hotel bill. I had left two free days to say good-bye to the ocean and check my baggage. Addlepat as I am, I hardly thought I could forget that small detail.

I think the Chance Acquaintance was sorry to see me go. I half agreed to come to her wedding and I promised myself to send her an unusually nice present. How I wish the Wainwright girls kept a little shop and I could buy it from them.

I was lucky enough to have the train an hour and a half late, so after all it was dark when I reached my house. I much preferred this. The night is such a kindly friend; it effaces all wrinkles in suit or face and even works magic with car dirt. As I drove up the Youthful Pessimist was standing at her gate.

"You are late, Timothy, give an account of yourself, sir," she ordered sternly.

I meekly obeyed her and so satisfactorily did I fulfill her behest that she kissed me, car dirt and all, and left me with the comforting assurance that my servants were impatiently awaiting me and that she would be over in a short space of time.

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It was a breezy September night and the swaying of the heavy rocking chairs upon the porch drowned the crunch of the gravel beneath my feet. And I took care to step as quietly as possible. I liked to think that, while my little house seemed so silent and empty, I had but to lift the knocker to have three black Jacks-in-the-boxes pop out at me. Doubtless they were preparing for me just as busily as if I had, at the last minute, notified them of my arrival. If Patsy had settled on popovers for supper, she was considering the making of a second batch, the first having fallen until they were as cold and heavy as the pastry of a store pie.

As I stood upon the porch and looked about me, my heart swelled with pride at the sight of my home. I tried to tell myself that it was a mere box of a place but secretly I did not see how mortal man could desire anything better. Though a landscape gardener might have utilized the ground space to more advantage, I should then have lost the exquisite pleasure of selecting my own plants and have had literally a laid-out garden, and I question if the whole would have been as quaint and harmonious as my bit of forest and my arches of roses. Also I am fully aware that an interior decorator could have worked marvels within

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my house yet I doubt if he could duplicate my old-fashioned mahogany that belonged to my grandfather and shines with a luster only produced by black elbow grease.

At one and the same time, I lifted the knocker and pulled my door bell and, at the sound of the unholy clamor, my servants opened the door and fell upon me. Ratius took my suitcase, Roger my hat and cane, while Patsy sauntered to the kitchen in a care-free manner that told me she had prepared for my delectation not popovers but the safe and reliable muffin that can, with a little skill, be heated until practically it is as good as new.

In half an hour I was comforted without and within and went to the living-room to look about me. I do not suppose that everyone is as fond of inanimate objects as I am and I remained so long in contemplation of my andirons that Roger hurried in to tell me that a storm the day before had slightly dimmed their luster for he had carefully polished them with an eye to my home-coming. I hastened to reassure him and, throwing a coat about me, went into the back porch where I met the Youthful Pessimist, who was just about to enter the door.

"I am going to walk in the garden," I announced.

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"I have been waiting for twenty-four hours to do that same thing," she answered and slipped her arm through mine.

Upon my word my lindens were making an outrageous noise. Their leaves rustled as stormily as though giants' hands were clutching their trunks and violently shaking the trees.

"They are talking to you, Timothy," cried the Youthful Pessimist. "They are saying 'We are glad, we are glad, you are home, home.' Can't you hear them?"

"I thought that was the breeze," I replied teasingly.

"Hush," she said, "it was the grass that told the good news of your coming. The wind helped it and bent over the tiny blades until they touched each other. The trees heard of it last of all and ever since have been tossing their boughs and whispering among themselves. It is good to be loved, Timothy."

Good to be loved, ah indeed, who should know that better than I and who but the Youthful Pessimist would try to persuade me that my garden had missed me and was shouting a welcome to me as vehemently as my servants had done.

It was a bright night with not quite a full moon and we paced the graveled walks sedately. Now and then we called attention to

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some flower or shrub and, when the fancy struck us, we talked, though for that matter I was quite content with the near presence of the Youthful Pessimist and the swish of her light drapery against my coat. She has a bee-like habit of flitting from subject to subject and I always congratulate myself when I am able to follow her trend of thought. We had been considering the advisability of raising mushroom-rooms in my cellar when she began to question me.

"And was she good-looking, Timothy?"

"Who?"

"Your Chance Acquaintance."

"Not especially."

"Was she attractive?"

"Most attractive."

"Was she clever?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Timothy, do you like her better than you like me?"

The moon was bright enough for me to see the eyes of my little friend. They are full of laughter, but underneath lies a well of wistfulness that in moments of sorrow drowns the dancing of those blue eyes. Sometimes I shudder to think that somebody might kill the laughter and leave only the well of wistfulness. Without looking I knew that just now the eyes

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implored. O jealous Youthful Pessimist, have I not nailed my flag to your mast? A whole army of Chance Acquaintances could not come between us.

When the Youthful Pessimist gets in this frame of mind, I do not hesitate but tell her of my devotion in unmistakable language. I literally drench her with my love and, like the ferns in my swinging baskets, she absorbs the storm and rises but the fresher from my down-pour of compliments. At these periods, as a child, she kissed my hands, as a woman, she squeezes my arm and says little. When I had finished, she only murmured, "You are so thorough, Timothy," but the laughter shone again in her eyes as she bid me stop and listen. There were other footsteps on the gravel walk. Sellars had come to welcome me home.

CHAPTER XII

IDLE THOUGHTS

MY two guests did not tarry with me long that night. They left before "Old Anne's" megaphone call, an event that takes place promptly at ten-thirty o'clock. "Old Anne" is old-fashioned enough to believe in beauty sleep and the megaphone is always in such excellent repair that I cannot pretend not to hear. I am scrupulously careful not to encourage the Youthful Pessimist to disregard these summons [I use the plural here for, instigated by "Old Anne," the father of the Youthful Pessimist shouts lustily for his daughter at ten-minute intervals], yet I am amused at the change of attitude the increasing years have wrought in my little friend. Whereas, she was once deeply mortified not to outstrip that second call, she now only murmurs, "Good old dad," and goes the even tenor of her way. Sometimes I fancy she jerks a little impatiently at the strings that bind her to

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her mother's apron and, had I a child, I should allow her more latitude here and there. Whatever she may be to us, we cannot blink at the fact that the Youthful Pessimist is at last a woman, fitted to bear a woman's part upon this earth and, as such, demanding a woman's recognition.

I suppose that no child has been born into this world whose parents have not had a clear and well-defined ideal of what the embryo man or woman might become. Equally, I suppose there are no parents who have not had to readjust their point of view. "Old Anne" could hardly have been an exception to this rule and she must have stood aghast at the many-sidedness of the Youthful Pessimist. Shake the kaleidoscope as you would, no two combinations were exactly alike and all were attractive and of infinite variety.

The Youthful Pessimist is a very human individual and far from perfect. Obsessed as I am, I love her very faults that sit upon her as awkwardly as a scareface does on a pretty child. She has always enjoyed frightening the grown-ups and, unlike "Old Anne," I revel in her air of worldly superiority and enjoy her cynical comments upon life and its opportunities. It was I who nicknamed her the Youthful Pessimist and donated the absurd gold lorg-

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nettes that she brings forth, on the slightest pretext, with so great a flourish.

The Imaginary Listener inserts crisply here that there is nothing more insipid than pie without the pastry and, while I agree with the sound sense of his remarks, I wish to state flatly that the Youthful Pessimist is not crusty. Far from it. Neither, however, is she one of those soothing creatures from whom I flee as if pursued by a thousand plagues. Both Sellars and the Youthful Pessimist were in a most protective humor, that kind of mood that impels you to make a little fuss over something or somebody. I suppose a woman can always borrow a neighbor's baby to fill this emergency gap. As, unfortunately, I am not able to do anything of this sort, I fall back upon my garden and my flowers. I twine up the discouraged vines and put a prop under the drooping plants. I work until my back aches and the perspiration stands out thickly upon my brow. By severe treatment like this, I manage to stave off a second attack. After all work is the panacea for all evils.

For once Sellars and the Youthful Pessimist were in sweet accord. Simultaneously they forbade me to come further than the rose arches and told me that I must be a total wreck after my day's journey. Anne's manner was

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motherly; Sellars', medical. Anne urged me to go straight to bed and Sellars commenced what was to have been a pithy discourse on our nervous systems.

"My dear fellow," he said assuming an attitude as if he were addressing not a sceptical old man but an attentive and thunder-struck audience, "although you do not know it, you are physically exhausted. You may not feel it in your limbs just yet (note the caution here), but even a few hours of train travel tells on the nervous system. You are more or less under a nervous strain. Your muscles are tense and should be relaxed at the earliest possible opportunity. You——" I stopped him here by gently and firmly grasping his arm. To emphasize his remarks, he had been slashing at the rose arches with his cane and I do not believe in the massacre of the innocents. He broke off in midair.

"I forgot myself," he said deprecatingly.

"One is apt to forget oneself in the interest of science," I said warmly.

However, I let them have their way, said good-night and turned my face homeward. Not to go to bed as they supposed, nothing was further from my thoughts. Sellars was right. When one gets old, to put it baldly, one is often physically tired. I had my brain to cater to

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as well as my body. I had never been more widely awake, more vividly conscious of my own mental alertness. I had had attacks of insomnia before and I knew the symptoms. The fresh air of the garden was surely preferable to a sleepless pillow.

I tramped along the walks with a light heart if a heavy boot. I was glad to be home again, glad to feel the familiar ground beneath my feet, glad to listen to the rustling trees overhead. No one could hope to sleep in such a hullabaloo of noises.

Satan, needless to say, found some mischief for my idle hands. Whenever a belated frog, hurrying homeward, crossed my pathway, I turned him gently (with my cane) on his back and left him gazing up at the starlit sky. I can imagine his return home and the harrowing account he gave his irate spouse who probably had a curtain lecture already prepared for him.

"M' dear," he would croak, "such a horrible adventure. I was lucky to escape with my life." And then would follow details of how he was suddenly transferred from his front to his back and a description of his wonderful agility in regaining his natural position.

And his wife, slightly conscience-struck at the injustice she had done her husband, would croak solemnly back, "Umph, umph, m' dear,

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m' dear," tuck her liege lord into bed and place upon his fevered brow a cool, green leaf wet with dew.

Then in the morning what a surprise to find that more than one had had the same experience and how hard on the young bucks who, for reasons of their own, thought it wiser to keep out of the limelight. With such fancies I beguiled my walk and had just sat down on the bench beneath the crepe myrtle bush when "Old Anne's" megaphone called out "Anne," then longer and more drawn out, "Anne." For a minute I was frightened and then, as the calls ceased, I realized how unnecessarily nervous I was. The Youthful Pessimist had gone straight to her room and her mother thought her still with me. My only excuse was that some little time had elapsed since I left her at the rose arches.

I have said before that it was a noisy night, yet, underneath the rough blow of the wind, it seemed to me I could hear an undistinguishable murmur of sounds. Often I wonder if the garden is mine only in the daytime and if, at night, it reverts to its original owner. The house is different, of course, and I have sold the orchard and the farm lands; still I built where the homestead stood and the lindens and the woods are the same.

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When I think of this, I go back a great many years, back in fact to the time when I legally took possession of my property. I had had my eye on the place for some time but the old man and woman who lived there refused to sell and, though I scoured the country for miles around, I could find nothing else to strike my fancy. The piece of ground had crept into my heart to stay and so, when quite suddenly the old woman died, and a son appeared from the West and advertised the sale of the property, I could not close the deal quickly enough. For that time, I paid a fair price and the father of the Youthful Pessimist bought the land adjoining mine at a much lower rate.

Though it seems a natural arrangement for a father to live with his son, I have always imagined a great deal of force was brought to bear upon the old man before he could be made to see the advisability of such a plan. I might add that the son had a western wife whom I met the day they formally left the old house. I was shocked at the old man's altered appearance and said so frankly to the woman. His shabby old clothes bagged upon him much as an empty shell hangs about a solitary dried-up pea, his faded, yellow blue eyes were red and watery and his mouth alternately dropped and twisted as he stared vacantly around him.

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"He does look badly for a fact," the woman agreed not unkindly, "but father's getting old. He's drooling all the time now."

I felt faintly indignant then, now I am horror-struck that I bought the roof above the old man's head. Since I have aged myself, I know that he was not drooling but grieving at parting with his sole remaining friends, the trees about my yard. I put myself in his place and realize that, if I were to be dug up and transplanted to the West, I would begin to wither as rapidly as he did.

On summer nights when I see the grass flattened by an invisible wind and hear the faint sighing sounds about me, I wonder if they removed only his worn-out body and left here his strong, vigorous soul. And that brings up the question, do I belong to the garden or does the garden belong to me? At my death, will I come back to the garden and pace these walks just as I have done this night, just as the old man and woman are doing now and, if I do, will I be able to give a pitying smile to the ignorant people of this world who do not understand that you never part with what you truly love and that there are some things that you can take with you to Paradise.

As they drove off, the old man looked back and back again, and I, half hidden by a hedge,

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turned away from those watery eyes that I might not tread upon holy ground. There is plenty of room for every one in the garden but it makes a faint, cold chill run down my spine to think about such subjects.

It grew later and Roger commenced to clatter the chairs upon my porch. I knew what this meant and went to the house and told him not to sit up for me.

"That's all right," said he, "I am just beginning to shut up for the night."

Roger exasperates me and yet what can I do about it? Unless I consented to go to bed, he would sit up indefinitely and, in the morning, be distinctly aggrieved at so doing.

When a boy, I often asked my mother's permission to go swimming. She would refuse and, on further persuasion, say haughtily, "Do as you like." And if I did as I liked, I always paid the penalty.

Roger's attitude is the same and I have learned not to kick against the pricks. We closed up the house and went upstairs together.

CHAPTER XIII

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TEN days after I came home I bought an automobile, not a large touring car but one of those cozy five-seated affairs that would allow me to have two invited guests besides the chauffeur, the Youthful Pessimist and myself. I also engaged McWhirter, a taciturn Scotchman, to run my car and I hope in this way to avoid any broils among my servants. McWhirter's chief attraction was that he did not desire to live on the lot and while I am not in any way under hack to Roger, Patsy and Ratus, it is always wise to keep an eye to windward. Patsy has unusual charm, Ratus a jealous temperament, and mine shall not be the hand that tosses the golden apple in their midst. So I passed over some excellent colored men that applied for the position and finally secured McWhirter. I have seen no reason to regret my choice.

That I might not be stranded on a lonely road, I have carefully studied the interior work-

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ings of my machine and I can replace a punctured tire with no damage whatever to the motor and with nothing more than a bruised finger to my own credit. I find no difficulty in actually steering my car and McWhirter has been good enough to tell me that I have proved an apt pupil.

I am sorry to say that my good neighbors have not a great deal of confidence in my ability as a chauffeur. The father of the Youthful Pessimist does not care for motoring. "Old Anne" frankly admits that she is not willing to go with me and the Youthful Pessimist has the same air of indifference to all risks that she assumes when she is about to drive off behind Anthony's prancing bays.

"Are you afraid?" said I in a vain attempt to read her thoughts.

"Not at all," quoth she.

"Why not?" I pressed her to the wall.

"You know why," she answered and smiled into my eyes.

Old as I am, I find myself occasionally overcome with shyness and this little speech left me tongue-tied before the Youthful Pessimist. To save my life, I could not ask her to explain those simple words, "You know why." I should believe that she intended to tell me that her absolute confidence in me overcame her

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fears, did I not know that she considers herself practically invulnerable and is firmly convinced that, no matter what may befall, she will inevitably escape scot free. Buoyed up by this comforting thought, she has learned to swim passably well, rides excellently, and is probably planning now to eventually run my automobile.

Unintentionally my purchase has been quite a little expense to her as she has seen fit to buy herself an automobilist's complete outfit. She has a heavy rough coat, thick, furry gloves and a head arrangement that is a cross between the bonnet of a Salvation Army lassie and a Seventh Day Adventist. As yet it has not been cold enough for her to don this toggery and, when she tried it on for my benefit, I gasped with astonishment. Bonnets, as well as women, are wonderful things and this one had transformed the Youthful Pessimist into a demure, meek-faced saint.

"Why don't you admire me?" she asked.

"It would not be proper. You look too holy," I answered.

"The change is undoubtedly refreshing," said she and fled before my laughing eyes.

The neighborhood will be greatly edified by this costume of the Youthful Pessimist as, just at present, while the weather is still balmy, she is wearing a rather shabby gray sweater and

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an odd-looking panama with a dull blue band about it that she bought simply because it bore this inscription, "I go a-fishing."

Sellars too, it appears, has designs upon my motor, not that he has said so in so many words, no, he is not as crude as that. He is, however, planning to get a winter overcoat, a garment I have not seen him wear during the two years of our friendship. Of course I can take a hint. Besides, the more seats I fill, the less room will be left for persons of Mrs. Catchings' caliber.

These extravagances of my two friends had a most peculiar effect upon me. I became dissatisfied with my wearing apparel and found myself constantly gazing in the windows of clothing stores. One day, out of curiosity, I slipped into one and carefully inspected those articles that seemed most necessary to the comfort of an owner of an automobile. A trying on followed next and, when I surveyed myself in the glass, with my fur collar pulled up, my fur cap pulled down, my goggles adjusted comfortably to my eyes, I could have cried out like the little woman in the Mother Goose book:

"If this be I, and I suppose it be,
Fol de rol dol diddle, diddle dee,
I've a little dog at home, he knows me,
Fol de rol dol diddle, diddle dee."

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If you must know the truth, what I really did was to pay the bill and order the things to be sent to my house immediately. So brand new and complete are we that the automobile and its occupants will have very much the appearance of Mrs. Catchings' drawing-room that was turned out by a northern furniture dealer and decorator. Not even the smallest detail is lacking there and yet that clever woman seems at times to positively hanker after my little home. It may be that she has a mania for refurnishing and that my furniture as well as my ways appeal to her as things that stand in need of a woman's touch. It may be, for I am always slow to understand Mrs. Catchings' motives.

I am so used to rambling on to the Imaginary Listener that I am apt to become a bit discursive, yet I find that one thought suggests the other in the most remarkable way. For example, Mrs. Catchings reminds me of my sick spell; my sick spell of Miss Perrin; and here I reach the astonishing conclusion that it was really the desire to see her home that first made me wish to own an automobile. Underneath my calm statement that it would be good for health ran the subjective thought of the Perrins' farm and so, when we had become fairly accustomed to swooping through the air,

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I planned an expedition, the object of which was to get acquainted with the members of the Perrin household.

When I phoned Miss Perrin to ascertain the exact location of the farm, I found, by a happy coincidence, she was going to spend the week with her family and she herself picked out the day for the trip. I had intended to take only the Youthful Pessimist, but Sellars insisted on accompanying me and, as straws are well known to show the shift of the wind, I began to wonder if Sellars was not a trifle over-interested in my nurse. I shall discourage this as I have picked out Molly Brighton for Sellars and I shall ask the Youthful Pessimist to help me throw the two together.

I decided to take a hamper with me to the farm to pave the way for the Christmas gifts that were to follow and Sellars and Anne picked out the contents of the box. I rejected all unsuitable proposals. Anne's first idea was brilliant.

"A chew for granddad," she announced.

"A box of apples," said Sellars.

"Ridiculous," I answered, "they have two trees in the corner of the farm just where it runs into the McCumber's estate. Try again, Sellars."

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"A jug of molasses," Sellars obeyed me willingly enough.

"Well," I pursed up my lips, "molasses is good at any time." The molasses passed muster.

"A box of Patsy's tea cakes," put in the Youthful Pessimist while Sellars said almost as quickly, "Some of Miss Anne's fudge."

I nodded to the last two suggestions but told them I must have some stout substantial articles in the hamper.

"Something sensible, children," I urged.

"A ham," said the Youthful Pessimist.

I shook my head. "They have pork on the place," I sighed.

"I know," Sellars shouted, "a turkey."

It was a good idea that turkey. I could hear Miss Perrin's clear, incisive voice, "We cannot afford to eat turkey, Mr. Wilkes. We only raise them to sell."

We settled on a turkey and I bought a fine large one that, as we packed it, made our mouths water.

I spoke to Sellars again about wasting so much valuable time, but he said with a cheerful face and a lugubrious voice that his practice was poor, extremely poor and I saw that, if he had taken the bit between his teeth in regard to Miss Perrin, anything I might hap-

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pen to say would have very little weight with him. As this was an unwelcome thought, I put it behind me and we started off merrily enough upon our little jaunt.

The Perrin farm turned out to be the actual reality of the sketch we had made of it in our minds' eye. The ground was hard and unpromising, the fence railing broken down and patched with odd timber (we expected that) and the sad looking, whitewashed frame dwelling would have given the lie to even the bravest attempts at prosperity. The Youthful Pessimist has the greatest respect for upright poverty and, though Miss Perrin is no match for Sellars, I knew more than ever that she was clean grit through and through.

The Perrins welcomed us stiffly, but here again we were not disappointed. They were just as we had thought they would be, Rosebud, a trifle prettier and Zeb, a shade more attractive, thanks to a chipped-off tooth that gave his lean, sandy little face a comically alert expression. As the hamper disgorged its contents upon the center of the table, he whistled appreciatively and I knew this was a good sign that the spring thaw, so to speak, had set in. Granddad cackled cheerfully over his tobacco, dad and mother surveyed the turkey with appraisers' eyes, the young folks nibbled hap-

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pily at the cakes and candy and only my nurse stood off aloof and on her dignity. She drew me aside.

"Mr. Wilkes," she said, "you should not have done this. You put me under too great an obligation. Of course, I am grateful to you, but——"

"You need not be," I interrupted calmly, "there's nothing for you in the hamper."

For a few seconds Miss Perrin digested my answer in silence and, greatly to my relief, ended by laughing heartily. Sellars came up then and proposed that we should take a look at Zeb's chickens and I was astonished to hear Miss Perrin make some trifling excuse and to find myself paired off with Zeb while the Youthful Pessimist and Sellars walked ahead of us. Zeb talked a little and whistled at all odd intervals and, though it made my hair stand on end, I discovered there was a certain, gay lilt to the air that aroused some dead or it may have been only forgotten memories.

"What's the tune?" said I feeling as if I could shake him.

"Yankee Doodle with variations," Zeb answered promptly.

It is horrible to think how people will murder music. I have always liked Yankee Doodle and I found it in my heart to call down the

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wrath of heaven upon the person who could so twist it out of all resemblance to its gay inconsequent self. I engaged Zeb in conversation that I might avoid an overdose of the variations and he gave forth the astonishing information that Sis was hardly ever out of a job and that Sellars gave her all his work.

We were looking at Sellars as we chatted when Zeb, who had puckered his lips to whistle, changed his mind, jerked his fingers toward the innocent backs of my two young friends and said inquiringly, "Sweet on her, ain't he?"

"Certainly not," I retorted hotly and watched Zeb narrowly to see if his remark was simply the outcome of his country raising that sees in every stroll a prospective march to the altar, or the deep-laid plans of an older sister who probably thought that anybody could pump an old man.

Zeb, I must say, took his rebuff calmly. He whistled and continued to whistle as he brought forth his chickens. They were a wretched and dejected lot and I promised him a setting of bantam eggs the following year and the gift of two stout hens the next time he came to town. I was afraid he would whistle his thanks, but some divine intuition prevented this catastrophe and I was able to leave the farm with some kindly thoughts of the Perrins.

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When we got home, Sellars sat on the porch with me for a while and it was on the tip of my tongue to tell him of Zeb's speech. Sellars, however, cannot bear a joke on himself and so, on graver consideration, I changed it into a compliment from none other than Timothy Wilkes.

As I gave him one of my best cigars, I said: "Do you know, Sellars, this afternoon I thought you were becoming positively Chesterfieldian in your manners?"

"Have I your gracious approval?" he asked.

"Of a surety," I said this heartily as I believe in encouraging good behavior.

He commenced to whistle jubilantly. I felt my hair rise on end. It was Zeb's tune.

"Stop that," I shouted.

"What is it anyway?" he asked.

"Yankee Doodle with variations," I snapped.

There was nothing particularly funny in that yet Sellars laughed hilariously. He was in such high spirits that I am afraid he already has a secret understanding with Miss Perrin.

CHAPTER XIV

“AND WINTER CAME”

I HAVE never known the days to slip by as quickly as they did this fall. Before I could take it in, the old year was out, the new year in and the cold weather laid its icy hands upon us. Though from an artistic standpoint, I love the winter, even as I admire the view from my porch, I shiver and shrink beneath the windy blasts and generally end by finding some excuse for a prolonged stay indoors.

Up to now we have had wonderful balmy days with just enough snap to the air to make it pleasant, but of late the skies have clouded over and there is an ominous chill that penetrates through the walls of my little house. Between the cold and the daily visits of O-Phelia, who is now staying with Ratus or me, as you may choose to put it, my temper has been strained to the uttermost and I find it hard not to tell my self-invited guest that she

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must clear out, bag and baggage, before another sunrise.

To-day she was accompanied by Ip and Ratius. He had a message for me and he listened with a scowling face as she ran over the list of her accomplishments and urged me to add her to my establishment. As, privately, I think she is planning to supplant Roger, I have a great dread that he may imagine me in cahoot with her and I was just about to speak my mind to her when I noticed that Ratius was surveying her with a cool, contemptuous look and understood that we were fellow sufferers in regard to O-Phelia. She concluded her talk with a coy glance at Ratius and said appealingly, "Ain't it so?" in a voice that should have melted anything short of a cast-iron heart.

Ratius, however, has been toughened by previous years of abuse and his only response was to gaze skyward, much indeed as if O-Phelia were not in the land of the living, and remark confidentially to me that he thought it would snow to-morrow. I agreed with enthusiasm, not because I like the snow, but because I saw that my implicit trust in Ratius was not misplaced. O-Phelia, as Ratius put it, was only temporarily out of a job and there was no doubt in my mind that her brother would find something suited to her capacity. I cannot pic-

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ture Ratus as a genial host when he is presiding over any table, even one that is spread, we will assume, by your humble servant.

The next day it snowed, as Ratus had predicted, and my trees looked as if they had been beautifully powdered with quarts of purest talcum. It was pretty and soft and fleecy enough, I will admit that, but with me a little snow goes a long way. I am always glad to return to my fireside.

I phoned for the Youthful Pessimist. She came over and, crossing her feet tailor fashion beneath her, sat down on the rug in front of my big open fire. She is a perfect salamander and loves the heat and, if cheered by a cup of cambric tea, will stay until her parents summon her to return home. It seemed a profitable moment to talk over Molly Brighton and Sellars as, hitherto, I have been too busy with my own affairs to give the matter much thought.

I told the Youthful Pessimist my fears in regard to Miss Perrin and recalled to her mind the deep interest Sellars showed in the Perrins' Christmas box. He accompanied us from store to store and opined that he was a much better judge of Zeb's suit than the Youthful Pessimist or I could ever hope to be. I went back to our first trip to the farm and told her of Zeb's speech with its underlying significance and she

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listened so attentively that she let the fire burn her face until it was as red as a peony.

"My dear," I said in real concern, "move back a little; you will ruin your skin."

I was thinking of "Old Anne" as I said this, for, though she does not interfere with the costuming of her daughter, she has two cares, the hair and skin of the Youthful Pessimist. As young Anne is prone to overpuff the former, "Old Anne" endeavors to superintend each hair dressing and, as for the latter, I have seen her rub on the cold cream while the Youthful Pessimist fretted impatiently and muttered cheerfully, "Oh, bother the freckles."

"If it could be managed, it would be an ideal match," I concluded. "Do you think you could help me arrange it?"

I depend largely on the judgment of the Youthful Pessimist.

"Doubtless we could arrange it," she answered thoughtfully, "but would it not be wiser to let it wait over until the spring? Just at present it seems to me we have our hands full. So far, ahem," she cast a mischievous glance at me, "we have made very little progress with those Wainwright girls and Thompson."

Now this was unkind of the Youthful Pessimist. When she spoke of delaying to the

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spring, I had intended to remind her that it was useless to shut the stable door after the steed was stolen. Her reference to Thompson threw a wet blanket over my enthusiasm. He brought to remembrance my Christmas dinner which was undeniably a Waterloo, not so far as pleasure went but so far as my hopes and ambitions were concerned.

The second Wainwright girl is a wonderful woman. She can do a little of everything and it is no effort to her to make a dime accomplish the work of a dollar. As she already has a strong leaning toward church affairs, she would be just the wife for an assistant and I felt it my duty to move her into a more conspicuous place in Thompson's horizon.

With this in mind, I gave a Christmas dinner and invited the two older Wainwright girls, Thompson, Corner, who has at last secured a modest clerkship with the distant hope of a rise in years to come and who has that unconsciously blissful look of one who is perpetually listening to the faint, sweet tinkle of imaginary wedding bells, Sellars, the Youthful Pessimist, Molly Brighton and a young man (I quote as usual the Youthful Pessimist) who was only eligible on account of his trousers.

I placed Thompson between the second Wainwright girl and the Youthful Pessimist

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and I must say that I expected him to know on which side his bread was buttered. Assistants, however, have a strong disregard for the useful and what was my disgust to observe that he was positively ignoring the girl I had chosen for him and was devoting his entire attention to the Youthful Pessimist. In justice to him I must say that he showed excellent taste for Anne had elected to array herself in a pale green and silver creation that made her appear as dainty and elusive as a dryad. I was wondering how I could better matters when the Youthful Pessimist came to my rescue, turned a charming though chilly shoulder to Thompson and dropped into earnest conversation with Sellars on her right. Under the circumstances, it was the only thing to do and I admired her for her quick perception of the situation, yet it was unfortunate that the table talk could not be more general for Molly sat on the other side of Sellars and, if the fates had been willing, I might easily have killed two birds with one stone.

After dinner, as Thompson still showed a desire to hang about the Youthful Pessimist, I whispered to Sellars to monopolize her and, in this way, extinguished any foolish flutterings of Thompson's heart. I suppose I should not ex-

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pect all my undertakings to be crowned with success.

“It was your fault,” I spoke accusingly to the Youthful Pessimist who had no business to bring up disagreeable recollections. “Why did you wear that green dress?”

“I look well in it,” she retorted with spirit, “you know I did my best. If only Thompson had not proved so difficult.”

“You were rather nice about Sellars,” I am inclined to be lenient with the Youthful Pessimist. “Does he bore you?”

“Not at all,” the Youthful Pessimist returned emphatically.

This is Anne’s nicest trait, this habit of making the most of my friends. Whether or not she likes them, she always meets them halfway and finds something pleasant to say about them. I happened to think again of “Old Anne,” who has this same trait and regarded the Youthful Pessimist critically. In spite of my warning, the child was really ruining her complexion. By this time even the ends of her ears were pink and, though the warm color flooding her throat and face was most beautiful, I forced her to place a fire screen between herself and the glowing grate.

To me afternoons like this are the pleasantest part of the winter. On milder days I have

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a blaze of driftwood logs and sit and dream of the sea and the Chance Acquaintance.

"Why not take a bit of the ocean back with you?" she suggested and so I made an arrangement to have several barrels of wood freighted to my home and, though it is an extravagant whim on my part, I love my tinted flames and the odd aroma that emanates from my driftwood.

If the weather would only content itself with snowing I might like the winter, but there come days when the hail and sleet make my garden a solid sheet of ice and I know without being told that I must make up my mind to lose many branches from my cherished trees. Only recently a limb broke off my linden and halfway crushed my little new birthday tree. I have not quite made up my mind whether or not this is an evil omen.

Also when the weather is bad, I forsake my sleeping porch, and warm and comforting as I find my feather bed, somehow I miss the cold air and the sound of the rustling leaves. If I were as big and as broad as Sellars, and my face looked as if I had just stepped out of a cold dip and, for the fun of it, done a half an hour's exercise with dumb bells, I should be as ardent an admirer of the winter as he is.

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As it is, I sit indoors and arrange suitable matches for a stiff-necked generation of idiots who do not know an opportunity when they see it. If they want to, let them go through the woods and pick up crooked sticks.

CHAPTER XV

THE SPRING

SAID I to the Imaginary Listener, "If only March knew that famous couplet, 'O wad some power the giftie gie us, to see oursel's as others see us,' he would not be as rough and as boisterous a companion."

Said the Imaginary Listener to me, "Rough he surely is and sometimes most unpleasant, still he has on the whole a sunshiny disposition and one great redeeming virtue, he ushers in the spring."

Of course this is true and, as I think about it, I feel much more kindly to March. Any well-trained child can sit through soup and dinner if he knows for a certainty that dessert is sure to follow and besides, when you get as old as I am, you are inclined to linger sentimentally over any month no matter how disagreeable its personality.

Now, if you read the farmer's almanack and I shrewdly suspect that you do, for each one of us has some little weakness to which we

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will not confess, you will find out that March is a good time for planting vegetables. Concerning flowers, such as I possess, my advice would be that you should continue to clean your garden, a job that should be begun in January, save for a few odds and ends, practically completed in February and brought to a triumphant finish in March. After which, you can, if you like, do a little planting.

I myself consider it a month of the wildest speculation for, sad as it may seem, you never can tell what a spring may bring forth. A shrub that blossomed last year like a mother in Israel may this season be a withered eyesore in your garden and, vice versa, a mere stick of a plant may unexpectedly develop into a bloom-covered treasure, the like of which cannot be equalled in the countryside around you.

But my dear readers you must not be unduly encouraged by the wonderful phenomenon of the mere stick, for it is by no means a regular occurrence. They say that lightning rarely strikes twice in the same place and surprises of the sort only happen now and then in a lifetime. The withered eyesore, on the contrary, may be a yearly visitor and, while I am no church goer, I believe that any reliable authority would admit that these ups and downs have more or less a religious significance. The

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last is a sort of triumphant proof of how are the mighty fallen and you can see for yourself that the mere stick is nature's best attempt at a picture of the redeemed sinner. I allow that a human being has as many possibilities as a plant and I am consumed with a desire to see such a transformation take place before my very eyes. I should be tremendously impressed if Mrs. Catchings commenced to grow a pair of innocent, white baby wings that is, of course, if I should be certain they were the real article and not simply an attractive pose on the part of my arch tormentor.

As Thompson's spring visit happened to coincide with Roger's spring cleaning, I was forced to entertain him in my garden and, having just inspected the decline of a mother in Israel, I explained the symbolic side of the question to him, using the plant as an illustration. Thompson is not very bright about putting two and two together, so I was most explicit in regard to details.

"The growth, of course, must come from within in either case," he said unwillingly.

I might add that Thompson is not imaginative.

"Perhaps the gardener might have something to do with the change," I suggested slyly.

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"Or it might be the soil," said Thompson examining a bit of loose earth with apparent interest.

I stared at my visitor with real surprise. Was it possible that he had given me a quiet but not unskillful thrust in payment for my insinuation about the gardener? "The soil," he had said in a tone of disgust that showed he considered me an unfruitful and unprofitable investment. I was as much astounded as if I had found a big, swollen plum in one of Patsy's breakfast rolls. Perhaps I had under-estimated the fellow's intelligence. After he had left, I talked about it to myself and I wished that my garden could have told me what it thought of his speech. That is the only unsatisfactory part about plants and trees. However well they understand you, they are forced to play such a passive part in your existence.

I would not for worlds have any one but the Imaginary Listener know of it, but I often talk to my garden. Particularly in the spring when the new life has burst through its winter cocoon, I feel as if I ought to say a word of encouragement to my tried and trusted friends.

"Come now," I admonish my trees, "you've done well before, I know, but see if you cannot surpass yourselves this spring. I may not be with you another season."

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And to the plants in the border I say, "Little friends, do not crowd each other too closely. Push up into the air and sunshine. There is plenty of room for every one above ground. I shall do my uttermost to make you happy and comfortable."

And last of all, I step close to my rose arches and, so that the envious shrubs may not hear me, I whisper, "You will do your best, will you not, for one who loves you so dearly?"

And, when the spring is here at last, I hate to leave my garden for fear something may grow a little while I am away. I begrudge the hours I spend asleep and, at the first twitterings of the birds, I am awake and eager to see what changes may have been wrought in the night time.

"Old Anne," to whom a flower or tree will always be a flower or tree, has very little patience with me at this time of the year and considers that I have been particularly provoking on this occasion. The cold weather gave us a late spring, but, when at length the sun and the warm rain came, everything grew with amazing rapidity. I had been prowling happily about my yard for some days before "Old Anne" descended upon me with the object of her visit writ upon her face.

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"Dear lady," I said in an effort to placate her, "you have come to see the garden?"

"No," said "Old Anne" with calm directness, "I have come to speak to you, Timothy. You must go out into the air and sunshine. This garden is a damp, unhealthy place."

"You know it's not," I spoke with absolute conviction.

"Well, if it's not, there's no use in becoming a hermit," Old Anne replied swiftly changing her plan of attack. "Besides now you positively make an idol of this garden. It is all wrong, you know."

"Why?" I asked.

"Why," she answered, a faint troubled line puckered up her forehead and I have pushed her to the wall too often not to be familiar with that expression, "why," she repeated firmly, "you should not make an idol of anything. What possesses you, Timothy?"

I looked at "Old Anne" whimsically. It was useless to try to explain to her how the first green sprouts against the rough, dark bark of my lindens affected me. Her ears were sealed to the hum of life that vibrated through the sunny atmosphere, her eyes were shut to the beauty of the foliage, to the soft greenness of the young grass, and I lacked not only ability to teach her to hear with my ears, but the

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magic spittle to lay upon her eyelids that she might, if only for one single instant, see the true vision of the spring. I fell back, so to speak, and intrenched myself in my fortress.

"A bachelor has so few interests," I complained.

The trouble grew on "Old Anne's" face, and I followed up my advantage.

"Many years ago if a certain young woman had not discarded a certain young man," I grew more plaintive, "I might have been happily married with dozens of interests."

"Oh, Timothy!" "Old Anne" sighed unhappily.

When "Old Anne" sighs, she touches my heart. I stopped teasing her at once, agreed that the garden was damp and promised her not to become a hermit nor to make an idol of my flowers. "Old Anne" is so practical, her temperament so even and sunny that it would be an ill-natured subject who would not enjoy the reign of so kindly a despot. In our thoughts "Old Anne" and I are as far apart as the poles and yet—but there is no use speaking of ancient history.

"Old Anne" chose other and more subtle means to lure me into the open. She sent over the Youthful Pessimist armed with a tea basket and a thermos bottle and the proposition

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that we should take our afternoon tea on the roadside. Surrounded by the enemy, I surrendered and the afternoon rides became a regular institution.

Sometimes at night I went out alone and drove the converging shadows before me and sometimes I picked up a pack of children and, to help the sandman, gave them a breath of fresh air. They were always eager to accompany me and squealed with delight whenever a molly cotton tail hopped frantically across the road.

At night time the Youthful Pessimist has manifold engagements with Anthonys and such like, but she saved the afternoon for me or rather my automobile. Sellars often went with us, and I was glad to see him take a little relaxation. He is making a name for himself and, as a consequence, is thin and I suppose over worked. We have all taken a fancy to the tea basket and the rug, upon which we sit eastern fashion, is always kept in the bottom of my car ready for any emergency.

The Youthful Pessimist insists that we have found one of nature's tea tables with a cleared space for our rug, a stump to hold the thermos bottle and a trickling stream near by wherein we wash our dishes. I am averse to this sort of work, so Sellars and the Youthful Pessimist do it together and appear to do it thoroughly.

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They are long enough about the job. This nature's tea table suits us admirably, but lately we have had to share it with some birds who built a nest in the stump. We were much mystified when the birds flew angrily around us and we narrowly escaped thrusting the thermos bottle into the nest so cleverly concealed and so full of tiny eggs. We have come so often since and behaved with so much tact that lately they have begun to ignore us, and the Youthful Pessimist declares that, thinking her a part of the landscape, they have even tweaked the corn like tassels that adorn her new spring hat. I accepted her statement, but classed it under the head of "truth is stranger than fiction."

I often see Sellars with Molly Brighton and have told the Youthful Pessimist that I do feel a bit encouraged.

"Well," she said smilingly, "you believe, don't you, that in the spring a young man's fancy——"

"Why of course," I answered, "how can he help it? Look about you."

The Youthful Pessimist was neatly packing the tea basket. She looked thoughtfully about her.

"Do you know, Timothy," she said irrelevantly, "you are such a dear."

CHAPTER XVI

THE GREATER UNDERSTANDING

MY automobile is broken and ever since I heard the bad news I have been plunged in gloom. These warm days I have become so dependent upon my nightly rides that to be deprived of my car for a good twenty-four hours makes me as fretful as a baby who suddenly finds his sugar rag jerked from between his appreciative lips.

It is now only the tenth of June and the thermometer has been playing about the hundred mark for the last week. It has been a scorching spell, uncheered by our usual thunder showers, and so depressed am I that I fasten all my hopes upon Thompson. Yesterday he prayed for rain and you can believe it or not the clouds have been banking up all the morning, and I have said to myself with intense satisfaction, "Something will happen before midnight." Provided the lightning spares my trees, nature can do as it likes. It's all the same to me.

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Yesterday morning Sellars came to see me and spent the better part of his visit mopping his brow and drinking quarts of iced water. He really came to tell me that the birthday baby was dead and, after he had imparted that sad bit of news, I felt myself growing as discouraged as he looked.

"Could nothing be done to save it?" I asked rousing myself from my lassitude.

"With money, yes," Sellars returned succinctly. "With a trained nurse, specially prepared food, a change of air, things might have turned out differently. After all it was the heat that did the business."

"I would have given some money," I said.

"As it is, you are always dipping your hand into your pocket. At best it would have been just a gamble. It never was particularly strong," Sellars answered with an effort. "As a doctor, you get such a one-sided view of life," he went on, "for no reason whatever you feel like shouting 'Down with the aristocrats.' Some of them are generous enough, too. A mother's a mother all the world over, you know, and somehow this baby's death got on my nerves."

Of course a mother was a mother and will be to the end of time. I have not forgotten how "Old Anne" wept for the little boys, and

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yet she had the satisfaction of knowing that no stone had been left unturned in her efforts to save them. My heart ached for the seamstress who must have sorrowed doubly that she could not give her baby its single chance for life. It gave me a queer twinge to remember that it had been named Anne. It was so suggestive of the Youthful Pessimist.

And the heat killed the birthday baby. I have been thinking of that ever since Sellars' visit. It came to me in the night as I watched the still trees and the listless droop of the leaves. It ran through my mind all the next morning while I felt as if the hot earth and the hotter heaven, two steaming brass cymbals, were about to close together for the sole purpose of crushing me between them. I thought of it in the long evening as I watched the banked up clouds. The rain might come, but the heat had killed the birthday baby. Weather like this, old people and young babies were best out of town and yet, I who could afford to go, stayed on though I was too exhausted to do more than cling limpet-like to my chair on the porch.

As I stared out into my garden that, by dint of much labor on Ratius' part, still preserved a semblance of freshness, I told myself that after all the last twenty-sixth of July had been a most

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unlucky birthday. The heat had killed the birthday baby and the birthday tree had never been the same since the limb from the linden had crushed it. The top had been snapped off and, in the spring, it had put out from the sides as if it would try once more to grow. It reminded me of a man who, having lost his right hand, makes a brave and noble effort to prove to the world that, when all's said and done, the left one is equally as good.

It must rain. I felt my irritation rise and thought that Roger was getting a little careless of me. That I might not have to move, I had a square table with my books and a pitcher of water placed by my side and I saw now that the front end of the cover trailed upon the floor. Roger had apologized for this and said that we were short of small tea cloths. It vexed me and I struck at it with my cane. I was vexed with Thompson, too, that it had not rained yesterday as I had expected it to do. It was far too dark to read, and I made up my mind when Roger had washed up the tea things, to have him move the table indoors again.

The birthday tree would live, but it would have to map out its life afresh. It could not hope to grow tall and straight toward the heavens. There was no power on earth that

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could make it a shapely tree again. I sighed and, as I sighed, I sat up in my chair and looked down the walk. The Youthful Pessimist had deserted her Anthonys and was coming up the path. She was walking rapidly, indeed, almost running, and I wondered at her haste. She came up the steps at the same swift pace, stopped for a minute before me and then, like some shot bird, tumbled into my lap and flung her arms around my neck.

"Timothy," she cried and I felt that she was sobbing.

"Are you ill?" I asked her anxiously.

She shook her head.

"Are the people at home ill?"

She shook her head again.

"Perhaps something has troubled you," I suggested, "and you just needed Timothy. Is that it?"

She nodded this time and I smoothed her hair as I had always done when she used to come to me with her childish woes. After all the Youthful Pessimist was not entirely grown up and, in the twinkling of an eye, had reverted back into a most unhappy little girl.

"I've wanted you all day long," she whispered, "I was ashamed to come until it grew dark. I've—I've disgraced you, Timothy."

Save for the fear of hurting her feelings, I

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could have laughed at the absurdity of her speech. Disgraced me, indeed, and yet her tone was so tragic that, in spite of my laughter, I felt a faint uneasiness stealing over me. I kept silent and, after a little, she commenced to talk. She told me of her love for Sellars, of his unlikeness to the other young men she knew, of their many meetings in my garden in which all unwittingly I had played so large a part and each word bit into my heart like a tingling drop of cold, hard hail.

"Why did you not tell me before?" I asked.

"I thought you would guess and afterward, I couldn't, Timothy," without looking I knew that she was blushing.

And while I was gathering my wits together to make the best of this bad business, she told me of the proofs of Sellars' devotion. First, his indifference, then his friendship and, at last, as she thought, his love. And in her daily intercourse with him, little by little, the knowledge had come upon her that Sellars, not abundantly blessed with this world's goods, was far too proud to follow where his heart had led him. So it had seemed to her that all might yet go well if she could but show him that with her money did not spell happiness, not by any manner of means. Then my little Youthful Pessimist, generous as her mother before her,

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had offered to Sellars to my mind the pearl of great price, namely her charming self. And when she had finished her simple tale, she cried out in a stricken voice, "He scorned me, Timothy," and fell to sobbing once more.

I put my arms about her and comforted her and I knew that I hated Sellars and wished never to see his face again. I took her story, bit by bit, and, when I had dovetailed the pieces together, just as at one flash the lightning blasts the tree, so the naked truth stood before me and thrust its jeering face into mine. I saw the Youthful Pessimist and Sellars at odds with one another. I saw myself patching up a friendship between the two. I saw myself in the garden appealing to Sellars to make that same friendship and I saw myself praising and approving each new move in the drama enacted before me.

I said to myself in a mighty fury that, "By God, Sellars had no right to overdo his part," and then, as the strength flowed from me, I knew it was I who had hurt the Youthful Pessimist and had humiliated her not only in her own, but Sellars' eyes. That I loved her better than my life itself was no excuse. Meddlesome old men, as well as lunatics, should be kept in solitary confinement. There had been so many Anthonys that it had never occurred to me to

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give a thought to the Youthful Pessimist, but even the most capable of caretakers are sometimes sleeping, and I had picked the lock of her heart and betrayed my little friend.

"Just what did you say?" I managed to ask her.

"It was last night," she began obediently. "He was so unhappy. He talked about money and what a difference it could make in our lives, the birthday baby was dead you see, and I said, that, if I loved a man, I'd marry him if he did not have a single penny to his name."

"But how could he tell that you were referring to him?" I said with a ray of hope.

"There's everything in the way you say a thing, Timothy," she answered with the frightened look of a child who is staring into some dark abyss. "And then, without even a good night, he went away."

"Without one word?"

She made a faint sound that I judged to be "Yes."

"Have you told your mother this?" I questioned gently.

"Not mother, Timothy," she said proudly, "not mother. Only you, you understand."

It is strange how often the sweet will creep into the bitter. In spite of my pain, in spite of the knowledge that I had wounded the

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Youthful Pessimist, I had one tiny thrill of happiness. With the wisest and best of parents, "Old Anne's" child came to me for solace. How could I undermine her simple faith?

In my mind I sought here and there for some solution of the difficulty and, at every turn, I found myself cleverly checkmated. Must I tell her of the part I had played in her affair with Sellars? That would only humiliate her further. Must I encourage her to believe that Sellars loved her? My own acts in the past made that an impossibility. Fortunately the Youthful Pessimist was too absorbed in her own thoughts to notice my preoccupation. Once she murmured pitifully, "I surely thought I knew," and once she said again, "He scorned me, Timothy." That cry hit me hardest of all.

We had both been somewhat oblivious of the heat. Now I was aware that my throat was parched and I must have water. I reached out for the pitcher and, at the same instant, we both saw Sellars coming toward us. If the Youthful Pessimist had run, he crawled and his head was thrust forward and his hands crossed behind his back.

The Youthful Pessimist whispered, "Hide me," and I motioned in the direction of the

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door, but she caught the lapel of my coat and said insistently, "the light."

I had forgotten that the hall jet made a clear shaft of light to one side of my chair. If she stepped in that, he would surely see her. I may have said before that I am ingenious. The trailing cover caught my eye. I lifted it up and the Youthful Pessimist slipped to the floor. I dropped the cloth over her and was drinking some water when Sellars did reach the porch.

If I had not been so angry with Sellars, I might even have pitied him so white and distraught did he appear as he stood in the shaft of light. I spoke coolly but civilly enough and he replied by placing his chair by mine. I thought of the Youthful Pessimist and prayed that he might leave quickly.

"Timothy," he began greatly to my surprise for we had not attained the intimacy of our christian names, and it seemed almost a foolish time to commence just as I was about to wind up our friendship, "I have come to talk to you because I can trust you and besides ever since I first came here you have been my friend."

I thought savagely that all that sort of thing was at an end and I wanted to tell him my true opinion of him, but somehow the words stuck in my throat and I had some natural cu-

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riosity. The man should give an account of himself.

"I've got, I suppose," he said drearily, "to drag out the family skeletons and shake the bare bones for your benefit. To do that I must go back to my boyhood. My father died when I was fifteen, Timothy, and I have never felt young since."

"Why not?" I asked without thinking.

"My mother," he answered swiftly, "she's a morphine fiend you know. What little money we had went that way bribing people to get it for her. You here in your garden can't take that in, but I lived with her for years. She grew to loathe me because I tried to save her from herself. I got an education, some way or other and scuffled along, half clothed and half fed. She spent all we had and, when I began to practice medicine and tried to put by a little, I found I must provide for her. She loathes me now and so I placed her with people who would care for her and to pay for that care I work early and late though nothing saves me from the sting of her contemptuous words. She did her best to ruin my name in the town where we lived, and so I cut loose from it all and came here to try to make good again."

He paused.

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"I liked it here from the first," he went on, "and then I met you and I learned what it meant to live. But I've cheated you, Timothy, from beginning to end, I've been a living fraud. You showed me Paradise and I, a beggar by the roadside, stepped in. I love Anne, Timothy," again he stopped and, in the white light, he trembled as if the recollection overpowered him.

"Until that day in the garden, I kept that thought out of my mind. It was like playing with fire. And then I promised myself I was man enough to stand the test. I have been happy here and, save for mother's letters, I might have been born again. It is so easy to slip down hill and so pleasant. I shut my eyes, Timothy, and deliberately tricked you, but I am not so low as I thought. I can't go on like this. Why I've never once told her of my love. How can I? Though I get along well enough now, there is always my mother dragging me down, down into the mire again."

I found my heart going out to Sellars. Tricked me he had, but, after all, I had not been mistaken in my man.

"And then?" I asked gently.

"Last night," he said thickly, "I knew I could not bear my life. I could not see Anne without telling her of my love and so I made

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up my mind to move again, to leave all this, to leave—her.”

“Why?” asked the Youthful Pessimist and stood up slim and straight beside my chair.

Sellars leapt to his feet. It was incredible how quickly his face changed.

“I’ve nothing to offer you,” he said dully, “no money——”

“You’ve yourself,” she put in swiftly, though her eyes smiled, there were tears in her voice. “Tell him, Timothy, that I am not a mercenary little wretch.”

“Timothy,” gasped Sellars hoarsely, “help me, man. There’s my lack of money. There’s my mother——”

I closed my eyes. I had to think swiftly for these two young people who stood on either side of my chair supplicating me. I ought also to think of “Old Anne,” but somehow I could not bring my mind to bear upon that phase of the question. That Sellars would abide by my decision I knew, from his voice, his words, his resolute face and yet—I felt as if a little machine within my brain was ticking out facts, actual facts.

First that Anne’s hands, like small night moths, fluttered lightly about my face. Second, that the heat spell was broken for I could hear the patter of the rain on the leaves of my

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trees. Third, that Sellars loved and was beloved by the Youthful Pessimist. Fourth, that Sellars had nothing but his practice and a mother who dragged him down, down, down, and fifth that nobody need fear want if they owned my house and garden. The machine stopped here and whirred over and over again, garden, garden, garden. When I died, it would all belong to the Youthful Pessimist. There was no reason for money to stand in the light of her happiness.

I felt a moment's exultation that after all there was nothing in Mrs. Catchings' theory, and my garden would be a boon to this child of my heart. I prayed that "Old Anne" might forgive me. The garden, the garden, the garden, whirred the machine. I spoke suddenly in Thompson's best voice.

"Whom God hath joined together," I said, "let no man put asunder."

CHAPTER XVII

THE NIGHT

THE Youthful Pessimist was married in the fall just as the trees had turned to russet and gold. When "Old Anne" heard of the engagement, she was vexed with me as I knew she would be.

"Why did you not tell me?" she asked reproachfully.

"I knew nothing whatever about it," I replied truthfully.

"When did you learn?"

"The very same night that you did."

"Anne told you first?" I detected the jealous note in her voice.

"Only because they happened to meet here and it just popped out," I answered with great tact.

"Old Anne" looked at me with a speculative eye. In the past she has been good enough to tell me that I am rather brighter than the average man, and I could see that she was mentally reversing her opinion. But she did

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not doubt my word and even assumed that I would side with her in preference for a long engagement. About this point the Youthful Pessimist remained smilingly obstinate and, after a little, "Old Anne" perforce accepted the inevitable. She came to talk to me of the marriage and, when I remembered that I could have stayed the match, I felt as if I had been a traitor to my dear old friend. During my illness she had taken rather a fancy to Sellars, but she shook her head at his limited income and said that she wished he had no mother.

"You wanted an orphan?" said I.

"I did not want anything, Timothy," she reminded me, and I squirmed under her frankness.

At times like this I feel genuinely sorry for "Old Anne," genuinely sorry for the three of us for we were all in the same boat. Of course the Youthful Pessimist would marry, that we had never doubted, still now that the break had come, we were as much surprised as though such an idea had never entered our heads. I thought that "Old Anne" would be happier if I could convince her that the lack of money did not matter and so I told her of my will in favor of the Youthful Pessimist. To my surprise she said, in a high dudgeon, that, if I mentioned the subject again, she

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would go home and, since I cannot betray the Youthful Pessimist, I am forced to pose as a sentimental idiot who, even if the gas and water bills remain unpaid, ecstatically approves of love in a cottage.

In the preparations for the wedding I think "Old Anne" partially forgot her anxiety. The Youthful Pessimist was charmingly docile and let her mother arrange everything. She accepted her trousseau and linen chest with becoming gratefulness, was delighted with her presents and, after suggesting that candles would look well on the altar, spent the rest of her wedding day out motoring with Sellars.

She was married at home, and I am told wore a wonderful gown. I saw her through a mist of tears and knew that I must map out my life again just as the birthday tree had done. When she kneeled before the altar and placed her hand in Sellars, I surprised upon her face that look that only blooms into this world when watered by a perfect love. So radiant, so exquisite, so wonderful was that look, so tenderly comprehensive and trustful that I closed my eyes before it. It reminded me of "Old Anne's" wedding and the Youthful Pessimist had said repeatedly that this was a joyful and not a melancholy occasion.

I did my best to live up to this admonition.

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I chatted with the guests, kissed the bride, congratulated the groom, drank their respective healths and was really pleased that Priscilla Wainwright, much to Corner's delight, secured the wedding ring. And when the merriment was at its height, I stood to one side of the room and looked about me, at my neighbors who were all so busily intent upon amusing themselves, the old folks sticking together Darby and Joan fashion, and the young people congregated in the center of the room in one laughing, chattering group. Among them, side by side, "Old Anne" and her husband moved, stopping here and there, until finally they reached the Youthful Pessimist.

Then a hush fell upon the crowd. The bride and groom were going upstairs and, as the news spread, the girls like a hive of bees swarmed about the staircase. The Youthful Pessimist walked up the steps leisurely and, leaning over the banisters, swung her bouquet above the sea of upturned faces. "One, two, three," she cried and I saw her throw the flowers toward Priscilla. In the babel of sounds that followed, I opened the drawing room window and slipped out upon the porch.

I had no definite plan in my mind and tried the famous experiment of simply following my nose. I went through their yard, under the

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rose arches and, once safely in my own garden, sat down on the bench beneath the crepe myrtle bush. The Youthful Pessimist and Sellars have monopolized this bush all the summer and I was conscious that it offered me rather a chilly welcome.

I have always thought that there were times in our lives when, save for our beating hearts, we were practically inanimate beings. In great crises in the shock of sorrow, we are apt to experience such feelings. We do not desire food, we are indifferent to heat and cold, our minds are blank and we stare ahead of us with unseeing eyes. Yet we live and our wonderfully busy hearts tick on unconcernedly until we choose to resume our wonted duties again. So I sat on my bench and brooded and, in the minutes that passed, I do not believe a single thought crossed my mind.

Then the Youthful Pessimist called me, but, in my garden, that happened any time. I did not trouble to reply. Then a hand was laid upon my shoulder and I saw Sellars and the Youthful Pessimist standing before me. As I traveled slowly back to earth again, I noticed that Anne had on her new cloth suit. They were ready to begin their honeymoon. They sat down on either side of me.

"Timothy," said the Youthful Pessimist,

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"I've been looking for you everywhere. It has been a splendid wedding and Priscilla got the bouquet as well as the ring. That was nice, wasn't it?"

I did not reply and she squeezed my hand.

"When I get back," she was talking rapidly now, "we will have to plan some more weddings. Look how quickly you got rid of me."

"I shall not plan any weddings," I said quietly.

"Why not?" she coaxed. "I think you are a wonderful matchmaker. We three are going to have gorgeous times together."

I suppose that I was still brooding. I really did not feel that I could answer her. She turned to Sellars.

"Tell him," she said, "how happy we are, for I am happy, Timothy."

"I am glad of that," I heard myself say.

"You did it all," she cried, "you and your garden. Without you, it would never have happened. You've been everything to me, Timothy, and oh, my dear, my dear, it is going to be exactly the same, just exactly."

I took her in my arms and kissed her.

"Were you not going to tell me goodbye?" she asked.

"I could not bear to," I confessed.

THE NIGHT

She kissed me again and this time her face was wet with tears.

"It's because I'm so happy," she exclaimed.

Then Sellars wrung my hand and they left me with a parting caution not to stay out in the damp, night air and, since I was on my feet, I obediently went into the house.

The servants were still at the wedding, and I had the place to myself. I went to my sleeping porch and looked down into my garden. I could see the bright light of my neighbor's home, I could hear the carriage wheels crunch on the road outside, but below, all was as silent as I was. It had done its work and now, with folded hands, it waited, for me or the Youthful Pessimist. I could not tell. It claimed her I knew. Octopus like, it had spread its coils about her and I foresaw that the day would come when she would hunger for my garden. I was glad to think that this would be the case and glad to think that I could satisfy that hunger.

I must map out my life afresh. Sellars was all sufficient to the Youthful Pessimist, and this wedding would draw "Old Anne" and her husband still closer to each other. I was alone, utterly alone.

As I said this sadly to myself, it was as if an intangible presence filled my porch. Out of

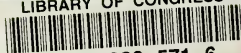
THE EGOTISTICAL I

nothingness, born of nothingness, made of nothingness, to pass again into nothingness, it came and stood beside my chair and comforted me. And formless and voiceless though it was, I knew it to be my last, my best friend, the Imaginary Listener.

THE END

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